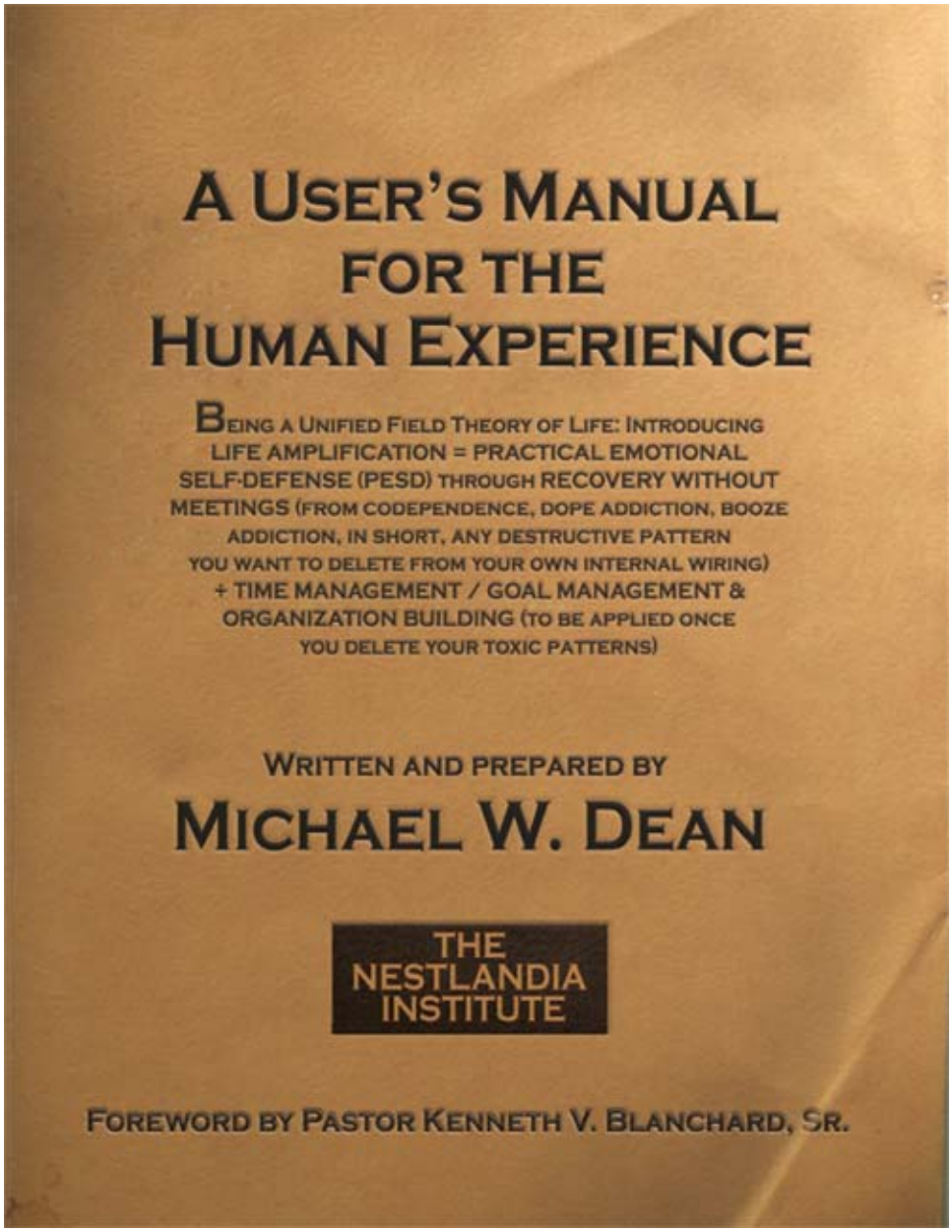
A User's Manual
for the
Human Experience
Being a Unified Field Theory of Life: Introducing
Life Amplification = Practical Emotional
Self-Defense (PESD) through Recovery Without
Meetings (from codependence, dope addiction, booze
addiction, in short, any destructive pattern
you want to delete from your own internal wiring)
+ Time Management / Goal Management &
Organization Building (to be applied once
you delete your toxic patterns)
Written and prepared by
Michael W. Dean
The
Nestlandia
Institute
Foreword by Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr.

A USER'S MANUAL FOR THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

a Unified Field Theory of Life

Introducing *LIFE AMPLIFICATION* =
PRACTICAL EMOTIONAL SELF-DEFENSE (PESD) through RECOVERY WITHOUT MEETINGS (from codependence, dope addiction, booze addiction, in short, any destructive pattern you want to delete from your own internal wiring)
+ TIME MANAGEMENT / GOAL MANAGEMENT & ORGANIZATION BUILDING (to be applied once you delete your toxic patterns)

Written and prepared by
Michael Wareham Dean
Foreword by Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr.

Press Release for the new book

A USER'S MANUAL FOR THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

by Michael W. Dean

SUBJECTS: Self-Help: Codependency; Self-Help: Substance Abuse & Addictions - General;
Biography & Autobiography: Personal Memoirs
Foreword by Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr.
PUBLISHED BY The Nestlandia Institute Think Tank
ISBN for paperback: 978-0970539236
ISBN for eBook: 978-0970539274
STREET DATE: April 15, 2009
WEBSITE, sample chapters, forum and contact: www.LifeAmp.org
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FREE VERSION: The Nestlandia Institute is offering the paperback book for sale on Amazon.com, but also making it available as a free eBook via BitTorrent on www.LifeAmp.org and GreyLodge.org to make it censorship-proof.

OVERVIEW
This is the first-ever book on **LIFE AMPLIFICATION** or "**LifeAmp**." The purpose of LifeAmp is learning to be *comfortable in your own skin*, and *making a living doing what you love*. This stunning new guide applies libertarian "no free lunch" and "no initiation of force" ideals to self-help.

The book teaches that **self-defense is appropriate and right**, and shows how to practice **PRACTICAL EMOTIONAL SELF-DEFENSE**, using the same standard of integrity when dealing with family, friends, strangers, work, community, the nation, and the world.

It's RECOVERY WITHOUT MEETINGS - from codependence, dope addiction, booze addiction...in short, any destructive pattern you'd like to delete from your own internal wiring. It then teaches you how to **MAXIMIZE YOUR WORK ETHIC** after you eliminate the toxic patterns and *SERENITY VAMPIRES*. ***A USER'S MANUAL FOR THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE*** is a post-modern guide for today's realist – everyone who knows that meditating on rainbows, angels and puppies won't fix them.

AUTHOR: Michael W. Dean is the author of the books *$30 Film School, $30 Music School, $30 Writing School, Starving in the Company of Beautiful Women, The Simple Pleasures of a Complex Girl, DIY NOW! Digital Audio* and *YouTube: an Insider's Guide to Climbing the Charts.*

Michael directed the films *Hubert Selby Jr: It/ll Be Better Tomorrow* and *D.I.Y. or DIE: How to Survive as an Independent Artist.*

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE BOOK:

“I knew Michael Dean back in the day, when he was a 19-year-old punk rocker with an appetite for self-destruction. I honestly didn’t think he’d live to be 30. But guess what? It turns out that Michael isn’t just a survivor; he’s a survivor who’s learned how to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness *after* recovery. For everyone who wants to know how to stay sane, develop a great work ethic, and make a mark on the world, Michael Dean has a great story to tell.
--Professor Michael Bérubé, Ph.D. (Penn State), author of *What’s Liberal About the Liberal Arts?* and *Life as We Know It*:

"Part intellectual memoir, part self-help book, Michael W. Dean's Practical Emotional Self-Defense (PESD) techniques flow from a wealth of life experiences, both positive and negative. 'The Only Two Rules in Life' have some radical, refreshing implications. You'll have to read the book to find out what they are!"
--Jason Sorens, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor, University at Buffalo, SUNY), founder of the Free State Project

“You owe yourself the opportunity to step outside your comfort zone and put yourself in the court with this modern-day Socrates.”
--Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr., author of *Black Man with a Gun*

FRONT MATTER:

A User's Manual for the Human Experience
Published April 15, 2009 by The Nestlandia Institute Think Tank

ISBN: 978-0970539236

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Many thanks to my father, Jack Ernest Dean,
and my mother, Virginia Wareham Dean,
for both inspiring me to work hard and follow my own path.

Book edited and proofread by Debra Jean Dean
Proofreading by Debbie S. Johnson
Cover design by the amazing Scott Ligon
www.ligon-art.com

Additional proofreading by Erin Carlier, Richard Hodges, Nunzio Capaldi.

Thanks to Kyle Bennett, MamaLiberty, Jared in Wyoming and Dreepa Lawless for reading the *long* fourth and fifth drafts of the (old) last two chapters.

Thanks especially to Kyle Bennett for asking me, "Who are you writing *to* in those parts? It feels like it changes from the world, to an old college buddy, to a family member, then to you as a young man."

That inspired me to finally *throw those chapters away* and write the much shorter and better "Letter to a Young Me" instead.

This work is dedicated to anyone who ever felt controlled, and incorrectly believed there was no way out.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword –
by Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr. 10

1. Greetings Eager Seeker 13
2. New Year's Resolutions Don't Work 16
3. The Only Two Rules in Life 34
4. Practical Emotional Self-Defense 41
5. Your Rights End at My Nose 56
6. From Netiquette to Restraining Orders 66
7. No-Contact Strategy 81
8. A Resentment and a Coffee Pot 94
9. Twelve Steps? How About *Two* Steps! 104
10. Hardcore Recovery Without Meetings 120
11. You Have the Right to be Left Alone 145
12. Stop Being a Victim 154
13. Work Smarter 167
14. Time Management for Calm and Profit 190
15. Make a Living Doing What You Love 212
16. Organization Building 226
17. Letter to a Young Me 245
Appendix - Recommended Reading,
Viewing and Surfing 258

HOW TO USE WEB ADDRESSES IN THIS BOOK
This book contains about a hundred URLs (web addresses). When clicking links from the eBook, you will have to hit the "allow" button in your Adobe reader to access the site.

ABOUT THE FORMATTING OF URLS
I contend that when a sentence ends with a URL, there should not be a period at the end of the sentence. Even though omitting the period does not conform to standard rules of English, I believe we're at a time in human progress where language should conform to technology, and so that rule should change. Because URLs with periods at the end *don't work*.

HELPING OUT
The author makes his living as a tech author, but *this* book is a labor of love. If you downloaded the book free rather than buying the paperback book, we're cool with that. But if you want to make a donation, there's a link for that on the website.
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Thank you.

FOREWORD

by Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr.

When Michael asked me to write the foreword to *A User's Manual for the Human Experience* I wondered exactly what I could say that would even make a dent into what you are about to read.

How about a *warning*?

You are about to share what my friend Michael W. Dean, a survivor, thinks about humanity, and his methods for dealing with it. Brace yourself for some bare-naked honesty.

Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." To Socrates, and maybe many of us, it is the *questions* in life that define us.

Abraham Maslow taught that one cannot "self-actualize" if one is constantly stuck in survival mode. If you are willing to hear what Michael is saying, you'll find all the elements of the human condition. There are times when you'll laugh, and times when you will want to cry in the retelling of his truths. Don't try to compare scars, this experience is more than that. He has defined it so you can feel it. Take his example and live.

A technical writer-plus baring his soul may not seem new but the context is. Here's a guy who's in a place in his life spiritually where he's not running away from anything. He may be at the top of his *pyramid*. I warned you earlier because this book is written in the same way Michael speaks. He's a straight shooter, a no-pretense and no-excuses kind of a guy that I love like a brother. Though he and I differ somewhat in our beliefs, the Christian who picks this up need not be afraid. The author has deference to those of us who believe in Jesus as the Christ in resolving human affairs.

I can affirm that you will not lose your religion in gleaning from him.

The Old Testament Book of Proverbs says, "*Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding*." Wisdom comes from amassing knowledge through experiences that we value.

I have never gone through alcohol/drug/codependence/sex addiction rehabilitation like Michael has, but I can still learn from someone who has been in that realm. None of us is above another. What makes the Holy Bible relevant for me is the timelessness of it. Despite our advances in science, medicine and technology, the humanity recorded within it has not changed much since the Beginning. There will always be people who are irritating or selfish, just as there will always be people who will steal, even kill and destroy life. But peace and joy abound still. How you handle those who cause misery, especially in your own circle, matters to us all. Understanding how we are to deal with negative people is a benefit we all need.

Do you ignore them, get rid of them, or allow them to continue to act as they do and provide you with guilt, pain and misery? Michael has answers for you. You are not going to get all "feel good" solutions either. This is yet another reason to read this book. Sometimes we need to hear or read something other than what is being said over and over by the parrots of this world. A different perspective helps.

We are all connected regardless of race, color, creed or religion. The human race has its aberrations and monsters. And unfortunately, sometimes they are close to you. Michael gives you his take on them and how he handles the noise.

If you will take a break from the din you are in, I can guarantee you will pick up a tidbit, a tool or a trinket to use yourself, share, or pass on to another from *A User's Manual for the Human Experience*. When I was reading the early drafts, the first thing I thought was, "Dude, why are you telling *all* your business? Who needs to know the intimate details of your life? People are so judgmental. They will brand you before realizing they have done so!" But then I remembered the qualities I learned early in ministry that I use in serving our Church. The qualities of transparency and humility keep the integrity of the person valid.

Also, as Michael says, his life is a "teaching hospital." He doesn't mind sharing the details if it can help someone else.

You are about to read the thought processes, actions, life experiences and redemption of a man who is unapologetic and unabashedly human. I challenge you to explore the possibilities that much of what you will consume is logical, possible and a good representation of how you can do better. I dare you to think,

and even discuss, some of the issues with another person who seems beyond surviving.

I have learned from experience that you cannot ponder the *meaning of life* if you are in a foxhole taking fire.

King Solomon was correct when he said there is a time and season for everything. It's time for you to investigate the assertions of this book.

But I have to caution you again. You will have to have some level of confidence in yourself and your beliefs to ask the hard questions of yourself. You don't have to agree with Michael on all the answers, but you do owe yourself the opportunity to step outside your comfort zone and put yourself in the court with this modern-day Socrates to see.

--Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr.
Washington, DC
Spring, 2009

Chapter 1 - Greetings Eager Seeker

WHAT TO EXPECT
Greetings eager seeker!

A User's Manual for the Human Experience teaches **recovery without meetings, and making your mark in the world.**

This book will teach you how to cut the deadwood out of your life, how to get rid of *bad patterns, habits, and people*, for good. It will tell you how to integrate boundaries, recovery, life, work, money, art and love. It will also teach you how to *work smarter* once you've cleaned house.

To me, these are not distinct elements requiring separate books or methods. They are all essential components of one synergistic and beautiful thing. We (my wife and I) call it *Life Amplification*.

Life Amplification is *one* thing in *one* book. Because as you treat your neighbor, so you treat your family, friends, enemies, strangers, boss, co-workers, art partners; even your city, state, country, and the world. And as you interact with your fellow humans, so you approach your work.

This book was originally to be called *Practical Emotional Self-Defense.* But as I was writing it, I realized it needed more than that. A lot more. It wanted to be something else, and I let it. I *listened* to the book and let it go where it needed to. When I was about halfway through, I realized the book was becoming a unified field theory of life. So I renamed it

A User's Manual for the Human Experience

WHAT'S THAT?
A User's Manual for the Human Experience is my entire course on *Life Amplification.* Life Amplification is my unique combination of recovery from codependence and substances (without meetings), blocking idiots, and using time management

and life skills (both mystical and down-to-earth) that can help you find your rightful place in the universe.

> NOTE: For ease of conversation, we usually refer to "Life Amplification" simply as "LifeAmp."

I love my life. I'm happily married. I've overcome adversity, learned new life skills and work skills. I now make a good living working at home as my own boss, doing work that I love. I will show you how I came to be able to do all of this.

> NOTE: I don't know if it's accurate in the conventional sense to say I'm "self-employed", I would say it's more precise to say "I work for the universe." But I certainly don't have a boss breathing down my neck.
>
> I'm not entirely against using the word "God" to describe my beliefs, and do use it sometimes, but I often just call it *the universe*. And I can say without any doubt that I believe in the power of the creator as expressed in *the universe*. I pray to *the universe*, was created by *the universe*. I know I will one day turn to ashes, and eventually to cosmic star dust and beyond, through the mysticism of the true entropy and extropy that run *the universe*. And I feel *certain* that all "consciousness", for lack of a better term, *does not end when my heart stops*.
>
> And I know that *until* my heart stops, *I'm committed to continuing to make my mark*.
>
> And I certainly don't mind getting paid to do so.

"WHAT HAS THIS BOOK DONE FOR ME LATELY?"
The main goals in this tutorial are: "Blocking *serenity vampires* from your life, and deleting negativity so you have more time and energy to do everything you always wanted to do," and then "How to do everything you've always wanted to do once you've *deleted whatever holds you back*.

> *(Serenity Vampires* is our term, often abbreviated in this book as *SV*, or in the plural, *SVs*, for people who make your life less serene, people who are "crazy makers.")

A User's Manual for the Human Experience is a total guide for life on the planet Earth. At least it's everything that's worked for me to transform myself from

homeless, miserable reprobate to happy and productive person, while still keeping my edge, and not becoming a "zombie", as many people do when they enter recovery. It's "how not to *die*, or wish you were dead, but not become a *square* in the process."

A User's Manual for the Human Experience synthesizes these practical concepts in an easy-to-digest blueprint for life.

I'M INTRIGUED. PLEASE TELL ME MORE….
Here's a thought on making your mark in this world after you "clean house" of toxic people and harmful behavior, then organize and streamline your energies to *live and work smarter*:

> **Whether you're painting the ceiling of the chapel or banging out three shaky chords in a garage, you are declaring your intention to smear your soul onto the veil of the infinite.**

A VERY QUICK HISTORY OF HOW I GOT HERE
I'm 44. Almost 45. Not *that* old, but old enough to have enough life experience to share. Here's a historical perspective of how old I am:

> *I remember when sex was safe and music was dangerous.*

I used to be a very self-destructive do-or-die drug user and drunk. I played in bands and toured the gin mills of America, Canada and Europe. I used to frequently go to bed with people I wouldn't go to lunch with today. I drove drunk, I overdosed on drugs (more than once), and I vowed to be dead by age 30. That was pretty much a *stated goal* of mine, for a long time.

I got off drugs and alcohol in 1994 (two weeks before my 30th birthday!), and entered a new life based on recovery and self-examination. I actually think that hitting bottom *helped* me, not only to change my life with regard to substances, but with *people*. After being sober a few years, I started to deal with codependence (addiction to toxic people). That's where the *real* work of recovery gets done.

Then I re-invented myself in new fields (writing and filmmaking) and became successfully employed in both. After that, I started working on getting *happy*. I fell in love, got married (which I used to *swear* I'd never do). Life got even better.

My life is still getting better all the time, and I'd love to share with you what I've learned.

A YOUNGER ME WONDERING ABOUT AN OLDER ME REMEMBERING A YOUNGER ME

I wrote this next paragraph in 1999. It's in my first novel *Starving in the Company of Beautiful Women.* I was five years sober, but still confused, not very employable, broke, worried about the future, and yet…somehow rather hopeful:

> There is a window across from the Greyhound station in the town where my daughter lives. Every time I visit her and take the 4 AM bus home, that light is on. I picture a person, about 44 years old, happy and content and working on cool art or a powerful novel by himself while his beautiful wife, who is also his best friend, sleeps or works on her art in the next room. These are the kind of sweet, silly little fantasy excursions that my too-intelligent brain wakes out of a slumber and entertains from time to time.

I envisioned this then, and now ten years later, *at age 44*, I'm *doing* it. I am the exact age I mentioned, and I've hit this exact cool goal. (Well, the book I'm writing right now is not a *novel*, but it is a *powerful book*.) I'm doing the *hell* out of what I love to do. And my wonderful, beautiful wife is sweetly sleeping next to me *right now* as I do it.

In the past ten years, I've gone from apprehensive, poor, and living in rat dens to blissfully married, productive, driven, talented, paid and well-known. I have the aforementioned wonderful wife. I have many published books, two movies out, a series of audio CDs, three nifty cats and a great life. I make a living doing what I love, and I'm a nicer guy now. And I have lasting moments of serenity every day. I used to rarely experience that.

This book will tell you how I got from 1999 to 2009, and how you can use some of the same tools to improve your life, regardless of your situation.

Ready? Good. I'll go ahead and spill my secrets on ya….

Chapter 2 - New Year's Resolutions Don't Work

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS DON'T WORK

I'm beginning this book right here, right now. It's New Year's Eve, at 11:41 PM California time, December 31, 2008. I'm hanging out with my lovely and brilliant wife, Debra Jean Dean (even her *name* is a poem!). She and I are spending a quiet night alone, and are very happy to do so. We are so darned happy almost all the time that we don't have any need to "go out and party." We *are* a party. Sure, we have friends, but everything we need is right here - happiness, love, warmth…and even three cats. Debra Jean's in the kitchen baking us some of her yummy cookies. We are two people who are so good for each other that nothing else is required to have a great time.

Individually, before we met, we weren't always like this. I'll tell you how we improved our lives, and how you can too.

We're not doing anything special for New Year's. We ordered out for some good food and we're doing laundry. New Year's Eve is just another night for us. We feel that if you live your life well, live each day, each week, each year, with purpose and integrity, there's not much need to pretend that a particular calendar day has much meaning. This is especially true the day the whole thing synthetically starts over again. We think it starts over *every day*.

And why wait to do your "emotional housecleaning" (and all other life housekeeping) on New Year's, or on any one day of the year? If you do *spot cleaning* throughout the months, there's no need to "dump everything and start over" at year's end. Imagine if you only cleaned your home, or did laundry, once a year!

And who wants to start the new year with a hangover and remorse, anyway?

I've never put much faith in New Year's resolutions. They don't work. Ask anyone. Ask yourself.

I took a random e-mail sampling about this, asking several people I know if they've ever made a New Year's resolution to change something big for the rest of their life. Of the people who had, the answers generally boiled down to something like:

"I promised to change my career, but that was two years ago and I'm still stuck in the same job." Or "I promised to not let other people run my life in the coming year, but by mid-January I'd broken that promise and am kicking myself for being controlled or bullied by my lover (…my family, co-workers, my friends, my boss…fill in the blank…)."

This kind of reminds me of that old nugget: "Quitting smoking? It's easy. I've done it dozens of times!"

WHAT IS PESD?

My wife and I have synthesized a simple program of detaching with love from people who make us crazy. We call it *Practical Emotional Self-Defense*, or PESD (Pronounced out loud, it's "PEST", which really underlines who we're trying to keep out of our lives and out of our hair. The acronym is also reminiscent of PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, which is something that PESD can help overcome, or even prevent.)

We use PESD a lot. Daily. It can be done without much effort once it's been practiced for a while.

WHAT IS CODEPENDENCE?

The best definition of "codependence" I've found is from (of all places) Wikipedia:

> A *codependent* can be loosely defined as someone who exhibits too much, and often inappropriate, caring for persons who depend on him or her. A "codependent" is one side of a relationship between mutually needy people. The *dependent*, or obviously needy party(s), may have emotional, physical, financial difficulties, or addictions they seemingly are unable to surmount. The *codependent* party exhibits behavior, which controls, makes excuses for, pities, and takes other actions to perpetuate the obviously needy party's condition, because of their desire to be needed, and fear of doing anything that would change the relationship.

So basically, codependence is when you care for and worry about other people, especially broken and twisted people, *so* much that it's *to the detriment of your own wellbeing*.

A classic example is the wife of an alcoholic who lies for him, worries constantly, suffers and slowly watches her soul die from being in a relationship with him, *yet cannot let go*. In more extreme cases, codependence is *an addiction to trying to fix broken people*. If the alcoholic dies, the codependent wife may even be likely to *marry another alcoholic*. She's addicted to trying to fix broken men.

Codependence can make people do extreme things while thinking everything's normal and good. Codependence *causes* people to think that the extreme is

normal.

I know a guy who once went to the corner payphone with a fistful of quarters so he could call his own phone repeatedly and leave messages to fill up his answering machine so he couldn't receive any nasty messages from his nutty ex-girlfriend. When I asked him whether unplugging the answering machine might have been an easier plan, he replied that he hadn't thought of it.

Sigh.

The above examples are of *obviously* codependent people. People dealing with seriously squicky people and situations. ("Squicky means "sick and icky", and also "skewed and icky.")

Yet more subtle examples exist every day. I'm sure you can name a few people who "make your life heck." We all have these people in our lives. But *why do we*?

> Most so-called "love songs" are actually "codependence songs." Think about it next time you hear one. Many songwriters aren't inspired to take pen to paper when things are going well, but rather when things are going *horribly*.

Codependence can be an unhealthy *attraction* to serenity vampires, but a lot of what we're going to deal with here is situations where relatively healthy people are *feeling* "crazy" from reacting to unhealthy people. In these cases, if the healthy people can effectively delete the unhealthy people from their lives, learn to recognize them in the future, and avoid letting more in, the job is 9/10 done. From that point they need only do a little tune-up from time to time on their "internal BIOS" (to borrow a computing term), in order to stay happy and healthy.

Our PESD system is for people who just want to minimize the effect of the serenity vampires, get their life on track, and be as productive and happy as they can possibly be.

WHAT IS LIFEAMP?
This book also deals with *Time Management* and with *Organization Building*. These, combined with PESD form what we call "Life Amplification" or "LifeAmp."

"LifeAmp" is the author's term for a combination of:

- Using PESD to eliminate the influence of squicky people in your life;
- Using PESD to block these people from your life;

- Using PESD to learn to more quickly recognize and block *new* squicky people when you meet them;
- Then adding in Time Management, Organization Building, and a *happy work ethic* guided with a bit of "street spirituality" to help you better utilize your energies after you "clean house."

The total goal of LifeAmp is to be *comfortable in your own skin*, and *make a living doing something you love*.

LifeAmp is not difficult to implement if you commit to it, and it works *very* well.

WHAT IS TIME MANAGEMENT?
Wikipedia to the rescue again. (Why reinvent the wheel by trying to improve a definition that's already been done well? That would be poor time management!)

> *Time management* refers to a range of skills, tools, and techniques utilized to accomplish specific tasks, projects and goals. This set encompasses a wide scope of activities, and these include planning, setting goals, delegation, analysis of time spent, monitoring, organizing, scheduling, and prioritizing. Initially *time management* referred only to business or work activities, but eventually the term broadened to include personal activities also. A *time-management system* is a designed combination of processes, tools and techniques.

Time Management also includes *Goal Management*, but our form of it isn't like most systems out there, in that we don't set you up to become addicted to buying an endless torrent of books, day planners, software and daily affirmation calendars. Everything you need is in this *one book* that you're holding.

WHAT IS ORGANIZATION BUILDING?
Organization Building is working effectively in teams, large or small. It differs from conventional "team building" exercises in that it can work on a smaller scale, and for any type of company, even a small ad-hoc group of two or three people that has neither the money nor the desire to hire a team-building consultant.

Also, Organization Building is based more on *meritocracy*, that is, finding and keeping people based on *merit*, and helping them work together, rather than hiring people based only on a diploma, then trying to "tune up" those who are ineffective in the real world.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

This book is for anyone who's not already perfect & blissed, but not beyond help. It's for anyone who has an open mind, wants to better their life, get rid of people and things that sap your energy. It's for those who want to do something *great* with their life but first need to get rid of people and things that hold them back. It's for folks who want to make great changes in their employment, financial situation, love life, art, or just feel better inside their own skin.

Let's put it in graph form. Let's make a continuum of "crazy-making" in human relationships. We'll number it from 0 to 100, with 0 being "totally sane" and 100 being "totally crazy." (When I use the term "crazy", I'm not being derogatory, and not implying actual permanent mental illness. I'm talking about the way we *feel* "crazy" on a day-to-day basis when we're involved in toxic or codependent relationships with friends, family, coworkers, etc.)

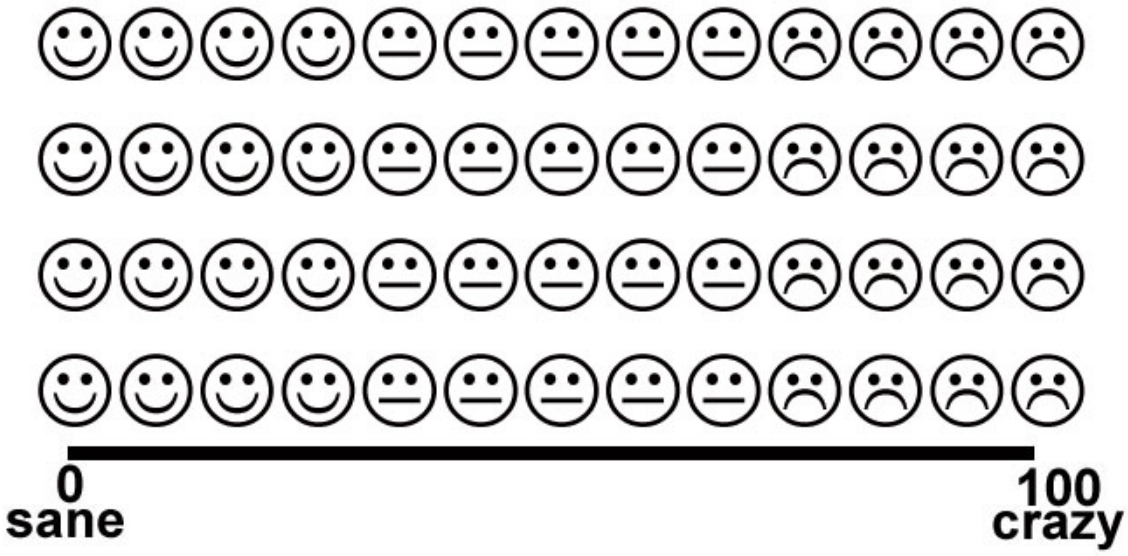

Figure 2.1
"Crazy-Making" in all human relationships

You want to be over on the left, near zero. My wife and I are, on average, at about 10 on this scale. That's a nice place to be, especially over a long time line.

Figure 2.2
My wife and I on the "crazy-making" continuum

I would say we're *at* zero, but nothing in life is perfect, and occasionally other people poke at us, as humans are wont to do, and we have to deal with it. This can sometimes cause us to rise to 25 or 30 on the crazy-making scale for a little while. But then, we practice PESD (again, that stands for *Practical Emotional Self-Defense*) and get it back down near zero. So our average is around 10 on this scale.

> Note: about 20 years ago, she and I hovered around 90. Yikes! This change is what allows me to speak to the subject of how to *get healthier*!

A zero on this scale would be "totally blessed." Not many people are constantly at zero. Perhaps some monks, but no one I've met. It probably isn't even *healthy* to be at zero. That would mean you are totally unaffected by anything that other people do.

In the same way that physical pain exists to let us know when our hand is on a hot stove, a healthy sensitivity to serenity vampires and other toxins will let us know when to "jump back from the stove" of the crazy-making people and *get away*.

Many people hover between 30 to 70 on this scale, which isn't great. That can lead to ulcers, high blood pressure and a shortened life. But these *are the people we can certainly help*.

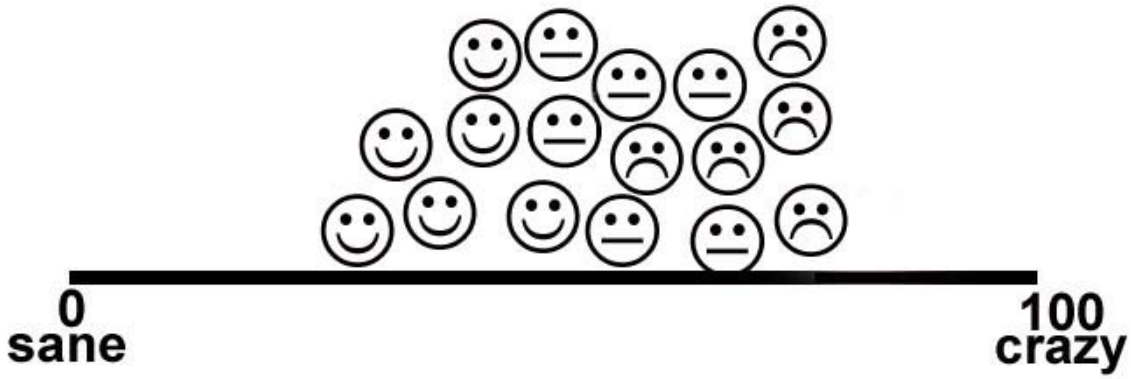

Figure 2.3
Where most people fall on the "crazy-making" scale

Hovering above 80 can lead to depression or even suicide, and is moving out of the range of what PESD can help with.

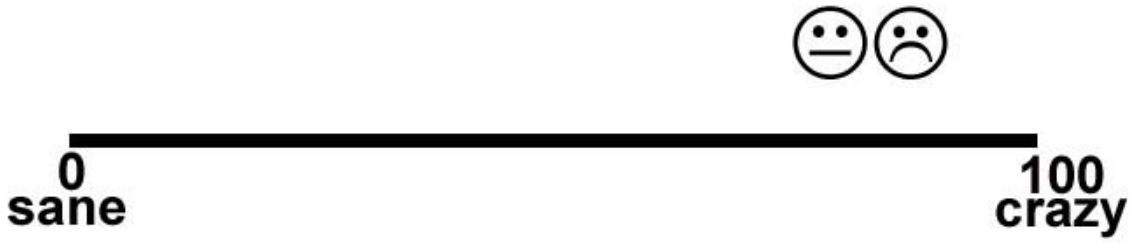

Figure 2.4
"Crazy-Making" that might end your life if you don't get help

Anything above 90 usually means you are involved with someone who is actively abusing you on a daily basis, someone of a seriously high cruelty level (perhaps even treating you in a way that is literally criminal), someone who is either stealing all your money, locking you in your home, emotionally destroying you, breaking your bones, or all of the above. It can lead to suicide or killing your abuser. If this is the case, this book isn't going to save your life. If this is you, *you need something that's beyond this book*. If this is you, please get the help you need. You deserve it.

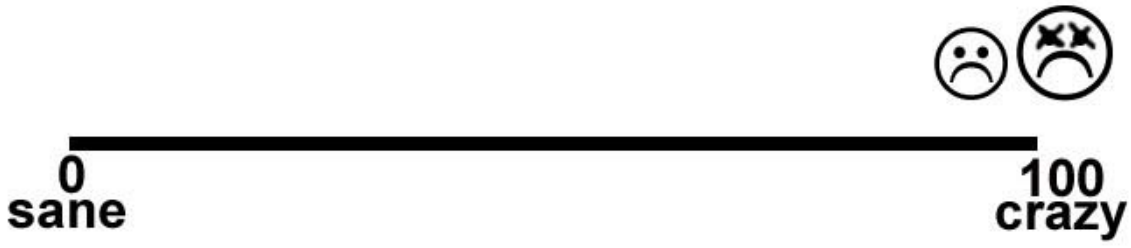

Figure 2.5
"Crazy-Making" that puts you beyond our help

This really isn't a book for people who are above 80 on this scale. They could certainly be helped by *something* here, but they need more than we can offer.

NOT QUITE "SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE", BUT CLOSE….
After I'd been going to AA meetings for a few years, I did a little quick math, and decided that while less than one percent of the population actually was *in* AA, probably five to seven percent of all people *needed* to be. Or at least would benefit from it. But when I went into Codependents Anonymous, I realized that nearly 100% of the world would benefit from it. While no where near everyone is an alcoholic, almost all people at one time or another put up with human interactions that harm them, and have no idea they can do anything about it.

> NOTE: I am no longer a member of AA, Co-Dependents Anonymous, Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous, SLAA, or any other 12-step fellowship. So I am not breaking my anonymity by saying that I *used* to go to meetings. As a non-member, the 11th and 12th traditions, which deal with anonymity, no longer apply to me.

Practical Emotional Self-Defense won't likely solve all the problems of people who are *currently dependent* on drugs or alcohol. It could help them some. But they probably need more at first, until they get the substances out of their bodies for a while, and have done at least a small bit of living sober. Twelve-step meetings

helped me with that, until I outgrew them and learned to stay sober, and grow, on my own.

LifeAmp in general, and PESD in specific, is *definitely* for the rest of the world – the 90%+ of us who don't have anyone truly dangerous in our lives, but are accosted by serenity vampires on a daily basis. That is worth addressing, because fighting SVs can *grind us down* over the decades.

This book is for the majority of the world, those who are at least occasionally "driven crazy" by others, but are not in a long-term *constant state of emergency* from substance addiction or from horribly abusive relationships.

If you are occasionally "driven crazy" by others, this book can help you lead a much happier life.

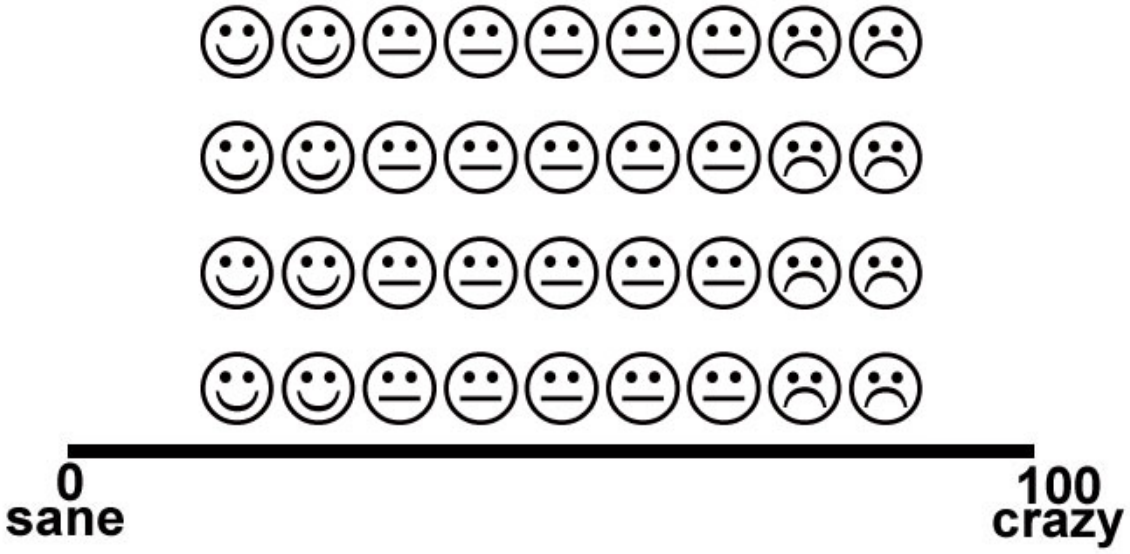

Figure 2.6
The large number of people who will be helped by this book

Also, if you *used to have* actual abusers in your life, have dealt with them, and are no longer letting abusers in your life, but still deal with serenity vampires (and soul mosquitoes!), this book can help. Consider it *grad school* after you have your basic degree.

LET'S DEFINE OUR TERMS

I sometimes refer to milder serenity vampires in this book as "soul mosquitoes" (sometimes shortened here to simply "mosquitoes") and sometimes also as "weenies." Serenity vampires are severe; weenies are just squicky and persistent. Soul mosquitoes are somewhere in the middle. I use these derogatory terms to really *paint a picture of the true nature of problematic people* in your mind. Because while we're in the early stages of learning to overcoming codependence, it can be difficult not to fall back into bad habits, to continue to be involved with someone who is bad for you. *Labeling them* in your mind will help your resolve.

> While I encourage the use of these terms, I *do not* suggest calling serenity vampires, soul mosquitoes and weenies such *to their face*. Serenity vampires are not logical people and it will only make things worse. But it will be easy not to call them names in person, because our goal is for you to not even have to *talk* to them much anymore, if at all.

I take the term "weenies" from the word "overweening" in this Bible verse:

> "The proud and arrogant man - "Mocker" is his name; he behaves with overweening pride." *Proverbs 21:24*

People I call "weenies" are *so darned sure of themselves* that they *know* they're *right*, and *have to prove it* to you, *even when they're dead wrong*. Know anyone like that? I do.

Using the phrases *serenity vampire*, *soul mosquito* and *weenie* diffuses and dehumanizes the problematic person in your mind. This helps you not feel bad (not that you should!) about deleting them and blocking them. This is done in the same way that in physical self-defense people often use the word "goblin" for someone who physically assaults you. Using dehumanizing phraseology may seem cruel, but it's not. It's a technique for dealing with someone who should not be in your life and in your head, but *decides to be there anyway*. This is an initiation of psychic force on their part, and calls for emotional self-defense. The labeling makes it easier to apply self-defense without worrying that you might "hurt their feelings." They're hurting *your* feelings – don't worry about hurting theirs.

Self-defense is appropriate and right.

Serenity vampires, soul mosquitoes and weenies all bleed you dry, though the serenity *vampires* do it more quickly (or more *squickly*) and suck more "blood".

But they're all of the same icky sub-species of human, and all are to be avoided. They'll *all* suck you dry over time, until there's nothing left to save.

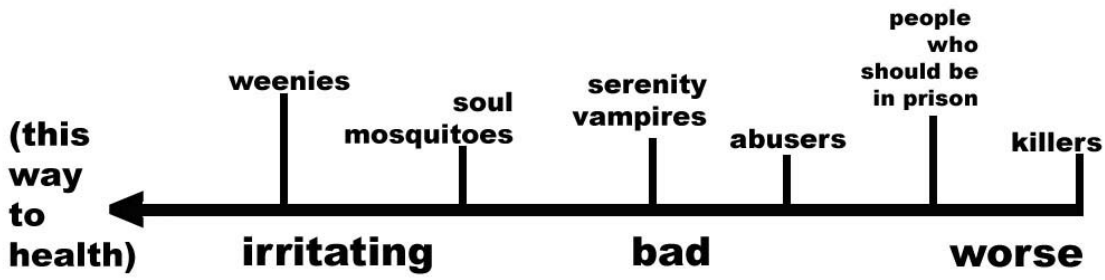

Figure 2.7
Toxic people, from least to most toxic

SPOTTING SVs

Most books on codependence deal with "abusers" or "narcissists" or "sociopaths." This book mostly deals with *weenies*, *mosquitoes*, and *SVs*. With *pests*. There are a lot more pests in the world than there are abusers, full-blown narcissists or homicidal sociopaths. So people often put up with weenies their whole life. What a waste of a life!

It's easier to spot actual abusers. They leave visible bruises, or at least severe emotional scars. Weenies and SVs only leave tiny scars inside, paper cuts on your soul, so it's easier to say, "Oh, it's OK, I can deal with it." People say this until they're old, alone, angry, and their soul is covered with scar tissue. But you don't have to do this. You can deal with the weenies, mosquitoes and SVs, starting today. Starting *right now*.

> Serenity Vampires are horrible. But while weenies and mosquitoes are certainly more common, the net-net bottom line is the same. Ten mosquitoes probably equal one hardcore SV, and five hardcore SVs probably equal one true *abuser*, as far as how they wreck your day.
>
> Some days it feels like we have a "Kick me!" sign on our backs, but more often it's as if someone has affixed a "Please waste my time!" sign.

If you want to minimize the effects of SVs and weenies in your life, and also *get out in the world and make your mark*, this is the book for you.

WHY THE AUTHOR IS QUALIFIED TO WRITE THIS BOOK

I am not a psychologist. I am an author and filmmaker. My wife, Debra Jean, helped me with some of the concepts for this book. (I asked her if she wanted to be listed as a co-author. She declined, because she felt she didn't do enough "hands on" writing to be listed. Her role entailed me bouncing ideas off her and her making suggestions, then editing and proofreading later. Maybe she'll be listed as co-author on the next book I write, regardless of the topic.)

Debra Jean is not a licensed therapist. She's a paralegal. But in my 44 years and her 49 years, we both have enough life experience, good and bad, *and* have learned from our own mistakes *and the mistakes of others*, to live our lives well.

Two men started Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935. One was a doctor, but he was not a psychotherapist. He was a proctologist. The other guy was a stockbroker. But they were both alcoholics seeking to recover. Alcoholics Anonymous has helped many millions of people turn their lives around, and has spawned over 50 twelve-step programs, including CODA (Co-dependents Anonymous) and Al-Anon, which both deal with addiction to *people*, as opposed to addiction to a substance.

Some of the other books I've written are required reading in colleges, even though I only have a high school diploma. (And I barely got that. I was too busy cutting class to go to the library, trying to actually *learn* something, and out in the world *applying* what I'd learned, to do well on tests.) Yet my wife and I both have at least a Master's degree-level understanding of several fields, from a combination of a thirst for knowledge, and practical application. I am a recovering alcoholic with many years sober.

After a few years off the bottle I realized that staying sober was the *easy* part. The hard part was "dealing with life on life's terms", which to me mostly meant dealing with *people*. I spent years in CODA and Al-Anon, did some time in SLAA (Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous), and also got some traditional psychotherapy under my belt.

As a recovering addict and recovering alcoholic I must say that I don't agree with the idea that recovering addicts and recovering alcoholics deserve a lot of unique praise beyond an "attaboy" or "good girl." Because people don't get that same praise for never having had those problems.

I really don't believe in "the Recovery Industry", and dislike the idea of people getting the special spotlight for telling the triumphant story of their valiant struggle with drugs. It perpetuates a *victim mentality*. I say "get over it man, stop being a victim, and *move on*."

> By "Recovery Industry" I mean some of those publishers in Minnesota, and others like them, and the parade of talk shows, reality shows, for-profit seminars, workbooks, pendants, "recovery coffee cups", plush toys, calendars and other commercialization of the *free gift that is recovery*.
>
> Disgust with that is part of the reason I gave this book away as a free download as well as selling printed copies. I like that recovery didn't cost money in the 1930s. So I don't want anyone who can't afford my help to be barred by their situation from having it.
>
> If you downloaded this book free and it helps you, feel free to make a donation later when you can afford it. Or don't. Either way is fine. I'm just happy to be of service.

WHY THE WIFE IS QUALIFIED TO HELP WITH THIS BOOK

Debra Jean's first husband was a drunk. She finally found the strength to kick him out, and ended up raising her two children without him. She suffered from, and overcame, the depression that arose from that first marriage. The children are both adults now. Debra Jean moved on. So can you. (And I am certain, had I been an active drunk or addict when she met me, she wouldn't be my wife today. If I were even still alive, the only interaction we'd probably ever have would be me panhandling her on the street.)

The main reason my wife and I are qualified to work together on this book is that we both used to be relatively unhappy people, and we are now very happy people. We now deal pretty well with problems as they arise, and don't hold on to the pain of the past for very long. We are relatively free from anxiety, and free from toxic relationships. We are both sober, productive, loving and enjoy the hell out of life on a daily basis, and have been over a long period of time. We both have long personal track records of being able to overcome hard times. And we both have extensive professional resumes of being able to organize, prioritize, explain, teach and transmit knowledge with simplicity and equanimity.

I usually write tech books, but every book I write includes an end chapter called "Closing Arguments" that is more about the *why* than the *how*. It's the spiritual chapter for agnostics, the "live a life that makes a difference" chapter. And that chapter is often the part that people remember the most.

Well, I'm tired of tech, have a lot more to say, and thus, this book is *all* Closing Arguments. (Which is why the last chapter in this book is not called "Closing Arguments." It's called "Letter to a Young Me.")

YOU CAN'T PLAY THE BLUES ON A GUITAR THAT'S NEVER BEEN IN A PAWN SHOP

My only child died two years ago of leukemia. Amelia was 22. The ultimate "dealing with people" is dealing with their death. I've heard it said, "You can't play the blues on a guitar that's never been in a pawn shop." Well, dealing with the death of a child gives one life experience that you can't get in a college textbook.

The death of your child is not like the death of a parent. My mother died eight years ago. I loved her dearly, but she was 75. She'd lived a full life. Dealing with the death of my daughter was about 40 times harder, and that is no exaggeration.

Probably the only tiny positive spin I can put on my daughter's death is that there is no longer anyone on the planet I am afraid of embarrassing by speaking my mind all the time. I previously held back some stuff in public, out of respect for her. But since she died, I've made a decision to lay it all out from here on out.

MORE ON MY "RESUME"

I've had a string of bad relationships. I've had to call the cops on ex-girlfriends who would not leave me alone. I've had to put a restraining order on someone. I've learned from all of this and will never make the mistakes that put me in situations like that again. I now know how to recognize and sidestep toxic weenies, how to present myself in the world, to other people, and to my personal vision of a higher power.

A big part of the reason that my wife and I have such a happy marriage is that we had both learned what *not* to do, *before we even met*. We'd both learned how to be whole *alone*, and weren't looking for someone else to "fix" us. Most of our other relationships were us trying to fix ourselves through someone else, or even trying to fix ourselves through trying to fix someone else. This doesn't work. *You can only have a happy love life when you already love yourself*.

> By "fix", we mean two things. The first is "repair." But "fix" is also junkie slang for getting a dose of heroin when you're going through withdrawals. The lack of dope makes an addict sick, so they are *fixed* by getting a "fix" (dose) of heroin. This same term, *fix*, is used by addicts and alcoholics in recovery for any behavior that they think is replacing the drug once they're sober.

Another qualification my wife and I have to give guidance to others is the fact that our love life is spectacular. Not only do we get along great, average less than one real argument a year (and always get past that quickly), and love to talk to each other, late into the night about anything and everything, we also make love at least seven times a week. And it's great. And it does not require little blue pills, even though I'm middle aged. We turn each other on that much, in body, mind and soul.

Debra Jean and I are both "go-to guys" for many of our friends, and even for complete strangers. We don't really give "advice"; we give, as they say in 12-step programs, "experience, strength and hope." And what we give people *works*, a very large majority of the time.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

I feel like people are put on this earth simply for the reason of having an ongoing spiritual experience. I'm having one, and Debra Jean is having one. We are "spiritual beings having a human experience." Our spiritual human experience does not involve Christ, church, and it no longer involves 12-step groups. *It's in everything we do*.

Sometimes we make mistakes, we *are* human, but we don't make the *same mistakes over and over* any more.

GETTING RID OF THE PESTS

They say that "insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." What we'd like to impart is showing you where this has been true in our lives, and where it might be true in your life. Then show what we've done to look for saner, happier solutions, and how you might too.

WHAT BOTHERS PEOPLE THE MOST?

Ask a dozen people what their biggest problem is in life. You probably think most people would put "money" at the top of the list, but I've found it isn't so. Some will mention money; some will mention their job. Some will say it's their kids, their spouse, their ex, their boss, their co-workers, their neighbors. If you boil it all down, most people's problems are with *people*. Even *the money problems usually boil down to an inability to effectively deal with other people*.

We want to show you how to keep those PESTS out of your brain!

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

I'm standing on the shoulders of giants here. The Nestlandia Institute's LifeAmp program is a new and unique way of interpreting some of life's mysteries. Much

of these methods are shown here for the first time ever. But some of it is an original synthesis of points already made in existing work by other people and organizations. I'll point them out as I remember. And *all* of them are listed in the "Recommended Reading" Appendix. They're all great folks, and while I want to take you further, or at least in useful uncharted directions, I couldn't have done some of this without them.

THE GOD THING

I believe in God, though I'm not a Christian. But I do try to live my life by the philosophy of Jesus Christ, and by the Ten Commandments.

If you're a Christian who has trouble hearing some of what I have to say because I do not call my higher power Jesus Christ, please consider listening anyway.

More importantly, if you're an atheist who has trouble reading what I have to say because I do believe in *something*, hear me out.

Author (and Christian) Kenneth Royce, a.k.a. Boston T. Party, said it well: "The sole fact that one is a Christian is no guarantee that they will be a good neighbor, any more than one's atheism guarantees that they will not."

Most of my friends are not Christians, but I would certainly agree with Royce's statement, and the inverse also; the sole fact that one is a *not* a Christian is no guarantee that someone will be a good neighbor, any more than one's Christianity guarantees that they will not. And unless a religious person has an overwhelming need to convert me, I find they usually make better neighbors than many agnostics and atheists. Christians believe in *something*, whereas many people today often believe in *nothing*, and have no ethical code of any kind to live by.

Like the saying goes, "When you believe in nothing, you'll fall for anything."

HOW I TEACH

This is not "Recovery and Time Management for Simpletons." Such a book would not work. Well, it might make you feel good about shelling out your money, and that might help you vow to make some really big changes, and stick to them for a few weeks. But that's just a form of New Year's resolution. And we know they don't work.

> That's another part of why I'm giving this book away as an eBook well as selling it as a paperback – so you will know my motivations are to *spread something I believe in*, not just to make a buck. My third reason for giving the book away on the Internet is so it is not

> *censorable*. If for some reason I were stopped from publishing it, other people would have it and could share it, even if I were taken out of the equation. Because, as the saying goes, "taking something off the Internet is like taking pee out of a pool with a spoon."

I work with a more Socratic method than the authors of most "how-to" books. I'll give you examples, parables, stories, ideals, questions, inspiration, a few challenges, and more. Maybe even ask you to ask yourself some *questions*. It's *not* "Step 1, Step 2, Step 3…" but it works even better than that, and is actually simpler. And more fun!

I'm *not* going to promise, "I'll solve all your problems overnight." That's the lie of most self-help writers, and almost all paid "life coaches." They promise you instant results, but deliver slowly so they can keep taking your money by continuing to hold your hand. Forever.

I'd rather teach you to solve your *own* problems, by showing you how I've solved mine. This will be less like school taught by a "book learning" expert, and more like a *conversation* - like a friend sitting next to you sharing experience, strength and hope….a friend who's *been there*.

READY? GOOD!
So…relax, curl up with this good book, put on your open-mindedness hat and hear our solutions to life's most ubiquitous problems. We'll start with a solution called *The Only Two Rules in Life.*

Chapter 3 - The Only Two Rules In Life

THE ONLY TWO RULES IN LIFE
There are really only two rules in life:

- **Do not initiate, or accept, force.**
- **Keep your word.**

These rules are in everything truly good that you've ever heard. They're in the Ten Commandments. They're in the teachings of Jesus. Moses. Buddha. The Dalai Lama. Emily Post. They're everything that you need to know that you learned in kindergarten. That's because these two rules are *innate*. They are the Golden Rules. The Natural Law.

I call them *The Only Two Rules in Life*.

All decent people have both these rules hard-wired inside the DNA of their soul. Sometimes people forget, or are influenced otherwise, but most people, if raised well, then left to their own devices, will follow these two rules almost all the time. Because breaking these rules, even if no one sees you, leads to pain.

BUT I HEARD IT DIFFERENTLY!
Many people say that the two innate laws in life are "Do not initiate force" and "Keep your word." (There are lots of variations on the wording, but all of them basically boil down to those two concepts.)

I agree entirely with these two rules as others state them. But it is also a natural fact of human existence that you do not have to *accept* force when someone breaks these rules. Too many people *do* accept initiations of force, and it festers. Over time we accept more and more force as "just the way things are." People become subjects, and eventually slaves. When many people "give in" to force, large or small, in their daily lives, they perpetuate this dysfunction until it becomes a global and historic disaster.

My wording of *The Only Two Rules in Life* may seem like three rules, but the *do not accept* force in the first rule is really part of the same thing. Do not *participate in force*, whether it's coming or going. If you do not exert force, you're living right. If you're not accepting force, you're defending yourself, which allows you to *live*, and to keep living happy and healthy.

Therefore, to be thorough, I've included "….or accept" into my version of the two rules. That is, "Do not initiate force" becomes "Do not initiate, *or accept*, force."

"Force" used in true self-defense does not break the rules, because you are not initiating force, you are using *only what you need* to *block* force.

Since this is a book on emotional self-*defense*, my wording of The Only Two Rules in Life is the clearest way for me to represent all these important concepts.

> Blocking SVs is basically just you saying *"Get off my emotional property!"*

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES
"Accepting no initiations of force" does not mean you have to stand your ground to fight *every emotional battle* that tries to come your way in life. Fighting *every battle* will make you prematurely old and tired. Some people just *want* to fight, and you can often simply *step out of their way*. They will either find someone else

who will spar with them, or fly past you and destroy themselves under their own emotional momentum.

The key to Practical Emotional Self-Defense is *learning the difference between battles that are worth fighting, and those that are worth sidestepping or blocking*.

RULE ONE: DO NOT INITIATE, OR ACCEPT, FORCE
Force can be physical or emotional. If someone holds a gun to your head and takes your wallet or rapes you, it's *physical force*. If someone coerces you into staying in a situation or relationship that you know is bad for you, it's *emotional force*. When someone bullies you, belittles you, or is passive-aggressive to you, they're also initiating emotional force.

> NOTE: "Passive-Aggressive" means insulting someone while pretending not to. It usually, but not always, employs sarcasm and irony. When someone says "Oh, *nice shirt*" but they're actually insulting your shirt with their tone, that's passive-aggressive behavior.
>
> Passive-aggressive people will also often use a *reversal*, where they say one thing, then contradict it with something else and hope you won't notice. Things like "I don't want to be disrespectful, but you're really an idiot…" The person *does* want to be disrespectful, but thinks that if they say otherwise, you won't stick up for yourself. (Not to say that every sentence that begins with "I don't mean to be disrespectful, but…." *is* disrespectful, but it *often* is.
>
> Passive-aggressive people also often give unasked-for advice as a way to belittle you.
>
> Passive-aggressive people usually deny that they're up to anything when confronted. Sometimes they may not be *aware* that they're doing it. They live life so deeply cloaked and soaked in sarcasm that they're not even sure what's true and what isn't when it comes out of their mouth. But they usually *do* know. They'll probably *still* deny it, but inside they're secretly laughing at you and thinking, "Zing! I really got him with *that* one!"
>
> A lot of people become passive-aggressive as a defense mechanism for dealing with rough people, but carry this along for life, even when not dealing with rough people. For many, it's easier to be "clever" and cut someone down instead of being positive.

Passive-aggressive people should be avoided like the cancer they are.

WE DON'T ALWAYS SEE THE SMALL THINGS
Sometimes initiations of force can be very subtle.

It's easy for us to recognize large initiations of force. If we saw someone coming at us with a knife, we'd get out of the way if we could. If we couldn't, we'd hope we could fight them off. But when someone comes at you with small emotional initiations of force, they're often very hard to see, because we are used to it, and believe the lie that "that's life." So we accept them, perhaps without even realizing it at the time. We accommodate. We bend. We *people please*.

NOTE: While being an SV is the aggressive side of the codependence coin, *People Pleasing* is the more passive "receiving end." A *people pleaser* is the person who tries too hard to make *everyone* happy, which is impossible. It's not healthy, and it is certainly a form of codependence. People pleasers are doormats. People pleasers consistently choose others' happiness over their own, often to their own detriment. You should work on not being a people pleaser. Because you can't save anyone else until you save yourself. You should also work on recognizing people pleasing in others. It's not healthy to be on either end of that equation.

Scammers and *users* often masquerade as people pleasers. They don't necessarily try to please *everyone*, but single out people who have weaknesses they can exploit. Don't distrust everyone automatically, but if someone you don't know very well seems overly complimentary of you, or overtly concerned with you liking them, look for *agendas*. The darker side of these agendas are often financial, but not always. The person may be trying to rip you off for money (or get you to be an *enabler* by keeping them in alcohol or drugs, or by just giving them an ongoing warm place to drink, or not work). Or they may simply be aggressively seeking friendship, love, sex, security, food, clothing (or all of the above) in an unhealthy way. These people are bums.

Show 'em the door, and change the locks, both on your house, and on your *soul*.

Sooner or later we become so used to people pleasing that we accept it as part of life. But you'd be amazed at how much of it can actually be avoided. And also how much passive-aggressive behavior we do *not* have to put up with. You

never need to even *encounter* most of it, if you are willing to rearrange your life a bit, including who you let in.

RULE TWO: KEEP YOUR WORD

This sounds like a no-brainer, but it's not. Most people, at one time or another, fail to keep their word to others. And worse yet, many people do not keep their word to themselves. And sometimes aren't even *aware* of it.

Keeping your word also means keeping confidences. People with integrity do not tell other people when someone says "keep this a secret." Even if someone *doesn't* say "keep this a secret", good friends intuitively know when to keep their mouth shut.

The world is full of gossips. Gossips are mosquitoes, and sometimes SVs. Avoid them.

Sociopaths can break their word without caring. If it hurts you inside when you tell a lie, you have a conscience. If someone can lie without caring, especially over and over, they are sociopathic, at least to some degree.

THE *TWO RULES* AND LAW

The Only Two Rules in Life is a new name for an old concept. These two rules predate law, but are also the foundation of every good law in the world. The first rule ("Do not initiate force") is about protecting life, wellbeing and property. It's the fundamental element of all good *criminal* law. It's why it's illegal to murder, rape, steal, defraud and vandalize. In every culture.

The second rule ("Keep your word") is the essence of all good *civil* law. When someone sues someone over a contract dispute, they are suing the other party for not keeping their word.

The Only Two Rules in Life have *nothing to do with* all the *silly* laws of the world, those that protect you from yourself and take all-important Darwinism (Spencerism actually – Herbert Spencer coined the phrase "survival of the fittest") out of the equation: seatbelt laws, helmet laws, the fact that in Calabasas, California you cannot smoke a cigarette *inside a house you own*. *The Only Two Rules in Life* have nothing to do with the fact that in Denver it is unlawful to lend your vacuum cleaner to your next-door neighbor. The Only Two Rules in Life also have nothing to do with laws that protect no one from anything, laws that only exist to employ lawmakers and enforcers. Like requiring permission or a "permit" to marry the love of your life or build on your own land. That stuff is not covered by natural law. That stuff exists because lawmakers think they need to keep busy to keep getting a paycheck. They don't realize that sometimes

inaction is all the action you need, and is better for everyone involved. Non-natural laws exist because people unwilling to fend for themselves scream, "There oughta be a law!"

There are already *enough* laws. Too *many* laws. When people want to make a new law, they should think about that saying from Al-Anon, "Don't just *do* something, *stand there*!" Sometimes inaction really *is* the best action.

> A thought: I feel that laws that "protect us from ourselves", those laws fostered by what is commonly called "the Nanny State", are very codependent in and of themselves. So are the people who enact them and the people who like them.
>
> I'm a grown man; I can protect myself from myself. And if I can't, that's my business.

"CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?"
I don't "hate the player", I "hate the game." I hate the idea that initiating force has become so "cool." Most heroes in most media today, from movies to songs to video games, are people who *take by force*.

(Notice I don't mention books? Only about 4% of the population even reads regularly these days. Reading is almost dead. If you're reading this, you're one of the few smart people left.)

But taking by force is not a new idea. It's age old.

I believe that the opening scene of the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* is probably the most accurate piece of film I've ever seen. It's almost a documentary, but there just weren't any cameras around back then, so Kubrick had to recreate it. Around the time of the Dawn of Man, some hominoid probably hit another hominoid on the head with a bone, to take territory and food (power and money). That was probably the first use of a tool. And before the tool was used, there was a lot of yelling. Yelling is emotional abuse, and it's usually a warning sign that more abuse is about to happen. And if the hominoid who got hit was to survive, he had to *defend himself*.

Anyone who thinks that self-defense, physical or emotional, is a policy perpetuating mutually assured destruction, please consider that you might be wrong. *Self-defense is the way of the world, and has been since day one*. Or maybe day two, at the latest. Some folks are just no darned good. Many people want to pretend otherwise, want to believe that everyone is good, and then aren't prepared when they run into someone who isn't.

PREPARATION FOR SELF-DEFENSE

The Only Two Rules in Life are all you need to keep *your side of the street* clean, in any situation. Living by The Only Two Rules in Life is also the kind of behavior to look for in others. If people practice the Two Rules effortlessly (especially without even *knowing* them as rules), they're good people to be around. If they ignore the Two Rules, you should avoid them and perhaps block them.

You cannot *make* people behave in an ethical way, so you will do best to step out of the path of anyone who does not practice The Only Two Rules in Life. Get out of the way and let them bug and harm someone else.

As I said, some of this may sound, at least on paper, like a no-brainer. Human nature is in all of us. We're all born knowing the Two Rules. But I'm amazed at how many people (including myself at times, especially in the past) forget the things that all humans are *born knowing*.

ACTION:

- **Write the two rules down, hang the piece of paper on your wall and study it daily**
- **Memorize the rules.**
- **Meditate on the rules.**
- **Look for places in your day when you break the rules. Look for places that others break the rules. Don't point it out to them when they do, just realize it for yourself.**
- **Do the same with passive-aggressive behavior. Note when you do it, and when others do it.**

Make notes. *Writing things down*, instead of just *thinking* them, is often very helpful. But keep your notes private. If your notes are on your computer, I recommend TrueCrypt, a free and easy to use encryption program, and HushMail, free encrypted webmail.

www.truecrypt.org
and
www.hushmail.com

For e-mail, PGP
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pretty_Good_Privacy
is a little harder to use, but more secure than HushMail.
www.pgp.com/downloads/desktoptrial/desktoptrial2.html

And with all your notes, read them a few times over a period of a few days or weeks, to see how your opinion on things changes with time as you grow and learn…as you *recover*.

> TIP: Something I learned in high school has allowed me to quickly and efficiently internalize *any non-fiction book*. The secret is to use a yellow highlighter and highlight *one sentence* in most of the paragraphs. In any paragraph of a well-written non-fiction book, there is usually *one sentence that sums up that paragraph*. This *master sentence* is usually near the end of the paragraph, but not always. Sometimes it's even the first sentence of a paragraph.
>
> After reading a book, think about it for a while, then go back and *just read the highlighted parts*. This will usually be an accurate summary of the book.
>
> When I first started doing this, I would do the highlighting on my second pass through a book. But with practice, I was able to do it effortlessly on the first pass.

So…this has been a rather short chapter, no? That's OK. It's some of the most important information in this book. Mull it over for a day if you want, maybe re-read it.

Then let's move on and *put theory into practice* by learning about *Practical Emotional Self-Defense*.

Chapter 4 - Practical Emotional Self-Defense

WHY "SELF-DEFENSE"?
The phrase *Practical Emotional Self-Defense* contains the phrase "Self-Defense" because it *is* self-defense. Not in the physical sense, but in the emotional sense. Even a spiritual sense. But the parallels to physical self-defense are uncanny.

ISN'T PHYSICAL SELF-DEFENSE AN "INITIATION OF FORCE"?
No. It isn't.

But the term "self-defense" is often misunderstood. Many good people are in prison because they did not know what self-defense *isn't*. Many good people are dead because they did not know what self-defense *is*, and didn't know that it's OK to use it, even if you don't believe in harming others.

Self-defense is not harming others. It is *protecting yourself from being harmed*. It is *refusing to accept* initiations of force. Jesus said, "turn the other cheek", but he also instructed his disciples to carry swords for protection when they traveled out to testify:

> "And he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one."
> --Luke 22:36-38

These swords were not metaphorical; they were literal weapons, to protect against wild beasts, both of the four-legged, and two-legged, variety.

Jesus even extended this to protecting others:

> "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."
> --John 15:14

I am not an attorney. But here is my layman's breakdown of what constitutes legally justifiable physical self-defense in America. This also has a lot of parallels for what constitutes righteous use of emotional self-defense:

It is legal in America to use deadly force to prevent yourself (and in many cases, someone else, especially family) from being raped, murdered or viciously beaten. The idea isn't to *kill* the attacker, but to prevent them from doing grievous bodily harm or killing you. However, sometimes the only way to stop someone truly intent on destroying you is to kill them. (Likewise, sometimes the only way to keep someone emotionally horrible out of your head is to completely cut off all contact with them.)

> FACT: Only one person goes to prison for every fourteen violent crimes committed in America.

I do not practice violence, but I am not a pacifist. If attacked, I fight back. Because self-defense, in a physical or an emotional sense, is *not* violence, it is *preventing* violence. If someone tries to kill you, and you did not provoke them, and the only way you can stop them is by killing them, it is not violence. It is protection.

> "If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account."
> --Exodus 22:2

> "If one comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first."
> --Talmud, Sanhedrin, Folio 72a

> "If someone has a gun and is trying to kill you, it would be reasonable to shoot back with your own gun."
> --The Dalai Lama
>
> "It goes without saying that people will protect their homes. This is a right guaranteed by the Constitution and respected even in the worst areas of the South."
> --Martin Luther King, Jr.

Using lethal force is only legally justifiable if they initially attack you, or initiate trying to attack you. If *you* start it, they escalate it, and you "finish it", it may not be self-defense.

Trying to *create* a situation where you "can shoot someone so you can get away with it" is legally wrong and morally corrupt. It's not self-defense. That's called "looking for a fight." That's one of the things we avoid emotionally in PESD.

I do not go looking for a fight, and avoid places where there will likely be a physical confrontation. Likewise, I do not go looking for *emotional* confrontations, and avoid them if I can.

In physical self-defense, legally justifiable response to force has to be proportional. Whether or not it is proportional is based on a number of factors, some of them subjective. They include the height, weight, age, physical condition, training and number of both the assailant(s) and the victim(s). For instance, a small, frail, sick old woman would probably be found justified by a jury in using a gun to stop two strapping-but-unarmed young men from beating her. A district attorney probably wouldn't even pursue this case, because of the public outcry that would come from dragging Grandma through that trial. Especially if Grandma has no history of criminal violence and the two young men do. And young men who attack old ladies usually have a criminal history.

A strapping young lad would probably NOT be found justified in shooting an old lady who was trying to hit him with her handbag. He'd probably go to prison for that, and rightly so. Especially when he could outrun her. Sticking around for a fight on the street when there's a real option to run away greatly reduces your chances of being legally justified in using force. ("Sticking around for a fight", and needing to "be right" are things we avoid in PESD.)

If we were to consider a case of two people of equal strength, age and sex, the victim would probably be found justified if he used a gun on someone who was swinging a baseball bat at his head (one hard strike of a baseball bat can

sometimes kill, and can certainly cause brain damage). A victim would probably NOT be found justified for shooting an unarmed person of equal strength (unless he could prove that he had knowledge that the person was a martial arts expert), unless the person broke into his home, but perhaps not even then unless the invader demonstrated real aggression. (And remember: people who wish to emotionally torment others usually look for people who are not emotionally capable of "fighting back." And tend to make very sudden moves that make it hard to get a logic bead on what they plan to do next.)

In your home, the rules are more in your favor. If someone breaks into your home in the middle of the night and you shoot them, chances are pretty good you won't serve prison time. Even if the person isn't armed. It's such a violation of the sanctity of "a man's home is his castle" that if someone even breaks in, you have an assumption they're going to hurt you. (Especially if they've seen your alarm stickers in the window, set off the very loud alarm, and come in anyway. Only a truly dangerous person would continue to enter at that point.) People have such a reasonable and legally recognized expectation of peace in the home that inside the home is where your rights are the strongest, and the rights of the criminal are the weakest.

Again, *I am not an attorney.*

Home is where the rights are. Remember that. *Home is where the rights are.* It's important not only in physical self-defense, it's also important in emotional defense. Remember, you carry your home with you. Your body is not only a temple, it is the temple of your mental and emotional well-being.

HOW THIS RELATES TO PRACTICAL EMOTIONAL SELF-DEFENSE
The idea of PESD isn't to *destroy* the serenity vampire. It's not to emotionally "shoot someone so you can get away with it." **The main goal of PESD is to avoid ending up in an emotional gunfight at all costs,** but being prepared to use our Jedi-knight mental and spiritual Judo *only when no other option is available.*

Not all violence is physical. Anyone trying to make you do something you don't want to do, be it by threat of violence, or by using mind tricks like withholding love, is guilty of a form of violence.

People who truly understand physical self-defense are willing to use it, but it's a very last resort. To this end, smart people have other precautions in place. They don't go to dangerous neighborhoods. They don't wear flashy clothes or jewelry. They do not walk around in "Condition White" (the oblivious state that most people are in when they get mugged).

In our PESD system, we will not only train you in last-resort mental and spiritual Judo. We'll also train you how to "not go to dangerous neighborhoods" emotionally, and how not to wear the flashy emotional jewelry that will attract serenity vampires. SVs, by definition, initiate force. It's emotional force, but it's still force. Again, *anyone who does something to someone else that the other person does not want done is initiating force*, whether it's physical or psychological.

PHYSICAL SELF-DEFENSE, AND PREPARATION

My wife and I have installed extra-strong locks on the doors and windows of our home. No one else has copies of the keys. We have motion-sensor lights outside the house. We have a good electronic security system, with alarm sensors on the doors and windows, loud sirens and flashing strobes inside and out, and it automatically calls the police, even if we're unable to. We have cameras outside the house, pointing at all points of entry, recording to an off-site hard drive. We have "ALARM SYSTEM IN USE" stickers on all the windows and doors. And you can see the alarm sensors and cameras inside our windows from outside the window.

We spent about 10,000 dollars on burglar alarms, cameras, and self-defense equipment and training. This all may sound paranoid to some, but it's not. We don't live in fear; we live in Los Angeles.

We also have a carbon monoxide detector, fire sensors, and two fire extinguishers in every room. (They're pretty cheap, only about 30 bucks each. As the saying goes, "you can never have too many fire extinguishers.")

It's all about priorities. Another couple in our neighborhood, Fred and Donna, spent over ten grand last summer upgrading their kitchen. But they have no home security system or self-defense plan. They are physically small people, and they have two small children. They have no alarms, no cameras and no way of defending themselves if some scumbag decides to harvest them for money and sick kicks.

But their kitchen sure does look nice!

If armed scumbags kicked in their door in the middle of the night, they'd dial 911 and pray, *if* they were able to get to a phone in time.

I am very glad police exist, and would call 911 if someone kicked in my door (my alarm system's autodialer would even do it for me, though I'd still call), but a couple of armed thugs can do a lot of damage in seconds, whereas the best police reaction times are usually about five minutes. Often, much longer. There are a couple of sayings that really speak well to this: "Call the police and order a pizza,

see who gets there first," and "When seconds count, the police are only minutes away."

> I know that last one first hand. The first week I moved to Los Angeles I witnessed a car accident and called 911. I didn't get an operator. I didn't even get put on hold. I got a *recording*.

Fred and Donna's house looks much like our house from the outside (except for our window stickers, visible alarm sensors and cameras). If you were a scumbag looking for drug money, and maybe a woman and some children to brutalize, which house would you pick? The one with motion-sensor lights, cameras, and "we have alarms" stickers, or the one with nothing at all? (This is an important parallel with PESD. Weenies and serenity vampires *need* to bug someone. And if you don't act like you'll let them, they'll move on to someone who will.)

My wife and I consider physical self-defense the absolute last line of defense. Our alarm system is the *first* line of self-defense. (This is important in PESD. If serenity vampires can't "break in" to your life there will be no need to "deal with" them once they're "inside.")

IF SOMEONE COMES TO *YOU*….
Home is where the rights are. And your "home" is not only your house, and your body, but *you*. If someone comes to you, rather than you going to them, and they initiate force, i.e., *they start it*, you certainly have a right to practice Practical Emotional Self-Defense. A good example is someone who always calls you or visits you or e-mails *you*. They always "start it." You're fine without them in your life. If you don't hear from them for months, you don't miss them. But you want to be polite, so you always reply when they contact you. And it usually ends poorly. That person is initiating force, and you should get them out of your life. They're spending more time thinking about you than you are about them, and you can do without them.

PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE SUCCESSFUL…
…if they earn it. If they work for it.

It's not success if you don't earn it.

But you cannot earn it, or even start to find it, if you are inundated with serenity vampires, as many of us are. You have to defend yourself against them, and begin to learn to block them.

How I do I define "success"? I define it as "succeeding at being an effective human being." By "being an effective human being", I do not mean being rich;

though being an effective human being often leads to material comforts. I do not mean finding a great romantic partner, though being an effective human being often leads to finding love. I mean being honest, being comfortable in your skin, and earning your keep on the planet Earth. *That* is success. And you have to *work* at it.

Maybe some of this was given to you. People who inherit money are not bad. People who marry their high school sweetheart and stay happy are not bad. There's nothing wrong with something being given to you. (As long as you do not demand, expect or legislate that it be given to you; that's not a gift, that's a form of taking by force.) And being lucky enough to be given a lump sum of money or meeting the perfect partner without having to search for years is not taking by force. Conversely, it is not, in and of itself, success. *Maintaining* that money, and maintaining that relationship is success. And that can only be done "one day at a time"; the way drunks stay sober. It requires constant vigilance, and a desire to grow and move forward. It means *work*.

Work means *not stealing*. People can steal money, but they can also steal time. They can even steal *affection*. If you work for your own money, and your own time, and your own affection, you are not stealing. If these things are given to you by a random act of the universe, you are not stealing. But if you coerce money, time, comfort or love out of someone else, you are a vampire, a bloodsucker. And if you continue to allow someone else to steal your money, time, comfort or love, you're the other kind of "sucker."

We will teach you not to be *any* kind of sucker.

That means working. Working at a job, and working at not being a sucker. (And if you've got a bit of "weenie" in you, it means working at not being a weenie!)

LET'S RECAP:
THE ONLY TWO RULES IN LIFE

- **Do not initiate, or accept, force.**
- **Keep your word.**

OK….moving on:

NO SUCH THING AS A FREE LUNCH
People who violate The Only Two Rules in Life are lazy. They don't want to work, so they steal, defraud, sometimes even kill. They initiate force, and don't keep their word. And those things are being taught as cool in today's music, movies and other media. It's not cool to steal, defraud and kill. It's not even cool

to be a serenity vampire. SVs steal *serenity*, which is more valuable than possessions.

People who steal anything want a free lunch. *There is no such thing as a free lunch.* This is an old statement. It comes from signs posted outside of bars during the Great Depression. Some bars offered free food with purchase of a drink, under the assumption that people would buy more than one drink. But so many people bought just one drink and ate a lot of free food that the bars lost money. Bar owners started putting up signs that said "NO FREE LUNCH." (Bars later changed this to the less aggressive sounding "two-drink minimum", but "NO FREE LUNCH" remained as a great phrase for how the world works. And many people have forgotten, or never learned, how the world works.)

People who want a free lunch, in anything, should be avoided. But sometimes these people do not *want* to be avoided. They may even feel they have a *right* not to be avoided. Avoiding them may require actions that seem aggressive, but actually aren't. You are not initiating force; you are *blocking* force.

My personal belief puts basic faith only in the people who are honest, and who want to work for a living. Life experience has taught me that trusting *everyone* is dangerous. Many people are SVs and weenies who want to steal your time and energy now, and continue to slowly dissolve your future.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

I believe that a main purpose of life is to give of yourself. But I'm not talking about giving money, I'm talking about giving time, knowledge, effort, skill, friendship and interaction.

Since our time on this earth is finite, I will only give of myself to people who are honest. And the "giving" isn't just out of generosity. It's to help yourself *and everyone who will ever live*. In the same way that buying and selling things helps the economy, interacting in positive ways with other honest humans improves whole human experience of every human who will ever live. We *get* by giving positive interactions, and by dealing well with negative actions when they arise.

Human progress, in standard of living, civilization, science, technology, art and knowledge, is all based on "standing on the shoulders of giants." There have been more scientific breakthroughs in the last 100 years than in all civilization before because people now have the collected knowledge of the past. Because of this, you can go further, *with anything*, in a shorter time than people did in times past. But to take it somewhere good, you have to share your wisdom, and you have to be honest.

Being able to tell who is honest and who isn't is a very important life skill. Once I've thrown out the dishonest chaff and kept the honest wheat, from that smaller subset, I winnow out the people who bore me. Very few are left, and I don't "clutch them like gold", because that will drive many people away. I interact with them in ways that make them want to be around me, and vice-versa. This is not "people pleasing" - it's doing what you're meant to do on the planet Earth. *We are here to have an ongoing spiritual experience*. This is possible even if you are not religious, but some people find it through religion. I am theistic. I believe in a creator, but I mostly feel the hand of God in simple interaction and the expansion of ideas and acts through my fellow humans.

ON BEING CONFIDENT BUT NOT COCKY

I'd recommend pursuing things that will make a difference in the world. But you really can make a difference without being a part of an important "movement." You don't need to invent a new biofuel, create something like AA, or help invent a new computer operating system like Linux. These are lofty goals, good goals, but not required goals. You can be an effective "human having a spiritual experience on the planet Earth" just by being a good parent, child, friend, or anything. Just by carrying yourself well, and by *working* at earning a living, love and serenity rather than stealing it. Some of the real heroes I've met are not people whose names you know. But they don't hurt others, they don't put up with others hurting them, and they are usually willing to take time to pass on to others, to give back, to interact, to keep the human equation working.

> There was a kindly smart older man in our neighborhood when I was about nine…the retired fellow with the 70-foot antenna jutting over his modest house. I spent several years of weekend days hanging around him in his "radio shack." I learned a lot about science from him. He really helped pique my interest in learning on my own, and "not just doing what all the other kids are doing."
>
> I must say, seeing his wall full of postcards from places I hadn't even heard of really made me realize there was more to life than our little town. It made want to communicate with the world.
>
> He was a wonderful early influence on me, and if he hadn't taken time to show me things, I might not be the person I am today.

HEAD START ON SUCCEEDING IN LIFE

The people who are the most effective in life are usually "comfortable in their own skin." Being comfortable in their own skin starts with not having low self-esteem. On the other hand, the people who are the most effective in life are usually not egomaniacs. The most effective people on this earth, whether they

are movie stars, scientists or moms famous only in their sewing circle, all have one thing in common: *They are confident, but not cocky*.

This is important, and there *is* a difference. A big difference.

- *Confidence* is having enough belief in your ability to make the right decision that you are able to act, but not so strong a belief in yourself that you won't listen to good advice.

- *Being Cocky* is being so sure you're right that you won't listen to anyone but yourself.

Being confident, but not cocky is an amazing way to be. It's the *goal*. It's how to feel "comfortable in your own skin" rather than feeling like a cut walking through a lemon world, where brushing against every little thing is irritating or downright painful.

And effective people do not tolerate SVs hanging around their lives.

EGO VS. SELF-ESTEEM

"Having good self-esteem" is another way of saying "confident, but not cocky." A lot of people, however, confuse confidence with ego. Ego and self-esteem are not the same thing. A large ego is often a sign of poor self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem does not need a huge ego. Ego and self-esteem are best maintained in relative balance; not even, but never in great disparity in favor of the ego. People who have a large ego to hide their poor self-esteem should be avoided. They are dangerous. Most weenies, soul mosquitoes, serenity vampires, abusers, criminals and even killers have low self-esteem and large egos. (For what it's worth, so do the fictitious heroes in many Hollywood movies.)

WHY WE SHOULD BLOCK WEENIES AND SERENITY VAMPIRES

If I'm to give the proper amount of attention to things I find important, I have to winnow out and delete people and things from my life that are destructive. The most destructive things I've ever had in my life have been people who are serenity vampires. Worse for me than the years I spent as a drug addict, and that is not hyperbole. Some days, the drugs gave me relief, even as they were killing me. SVs never gave me *any* relief. They always gave me *grief*.

Serenity vampires are those who *just want to create conflict*. Usually if you don't engage them, they'll go away and find someone who will give them the negative attention on which they thrive. Occasionally they won't go away quickly, and will be *really* persistent. Stalkers would certainly fall into this category, but lesser, non-criminal irritants can also.

If you truly wish to evolve as a human and be as happy and effective as you possibly can, at all you do, you need to work daily on getting better and better at the skills of identifying and blocking serenity vampires.

IS CONFLICT REALLY THE ESSENCE OF DRAMA?
People all have different agendas, and therefore will always be in conflict. But the idea of PESD is to limit the amount of unneeded conflict.

"Conflict is the essence of drama" is the first thing they teach you in screenwriting classes. Drama is good in movies. Without it, nothing "happens." But drama is *not* needed in life. Life can "happen", and even be more fulfilling, *without* a lot of drama.

DENIAL
Being in Denial means not realizing or not admitting to yourself what's wrong with you. It's living in fantasyland. Alcoholics, drug addicts and codependents are often in denial.

I've met many hardcore drunks who didn't know they had a problem. (I've also *been* a hardcore drunk who didn't know he had a problem.) And they usually think it's everyone else's fault. "If she'd quit yelling at me about my drinking, I'd drink less." I've watched friends who lost everything to their addiction and ended up literally living in alleys…covered with sores, literally dying, but telling me, "Heroin addiction isn't my problem. If I just got an apartment, I could *manage* my heroin use. I could '*party*' like I used to."

The guy I mentioned in Chapter Two with the fistful of quarters calling his own phone to fill his answering machine was in denial about his codependence.

People in denial think the "fix" for their life is anything *but* dealing with their primary problem. Denial is daily, repeated, ongoing ignorance of the truth. Denial is bad for you. Watch out for denial, both in yourself and in others. It is a refusal, knowingly or unknowingly, to acknowledge reality.

TRANSFERENCE
Transference is being mean to one person when you're really mad at someone else. Also called "kickin' the dog." (The boss yells at the man, the man yells at his wife, the wife yells at the older child, the older child yells at the younger child, the younger child kicks the dog.) It usually happens when people have found themselves in a situation where they've allowed a person to have "power" over them, so they don't feel capable of defending themselves against that person.

Transference is bad for you. Watch out for transference, both in yourself and in others.

COOPER COLOR CODE APPLIED TO PRACTICAL EMOTIONAL SELF-DEFENSE

The Cooper Color Code is a system created by Marine Lieutenant Colonel John Dean "Jeff" Cooper, who served in World War II and the Korean War.

His system is used by most American police and military organizations to teach different levels of awareness, as preparation for life-threatening situations. It is a method to help people think straight in the adrenalin-fueled world of combat. The codes are also used in physical self-defense training for civilians.

I find the Cooper Color Code *very* useful as an analogy in Practical Emotional Self-Defense. It becomes a *rainbow of awareness* for recognizing, and being prepared for, SVs, without living in constant fear, and conversely, without being oblivious and therefore vulnerable to emotional attack.

(Note, the description below uses the word "goblin"; as I've said, this is common physical self-defense speak for "someone who is out to kill you." The PESD equivalent would be "serenity vampire" for "someone who is out to kill your serenity.")

Here are the Cooper Codes, as explained well on Wikipedia:

- **White** - Unaware and unprepared. If attacked in Condition White, the only thing that may save you is the inadequacy or ineptitude of your attacker. When confronted by something nasty, your reaction will probably be "Oh my God! This can't be happening to me."

- **Yellow** - Relaxed alert. No specific threat situation. Your mindset is that "today could be the day I may have to defend myself." You are simply aware that the world is a potentially unfriendly place and that you are prepared to defend yourself, if necessary. You use your eyes and ears, and realize that "I may have to SHOOT today." You don't have to be armed in this state, but if you are armed you should be in Condition Yellow. You should always be in Yellow whenever you are in unfamiliar surroundings or among people you don't know. You can remain in Yellow for long periods, as long as you are able to "Watch your six." (In aviation 12 o'clock refers to the direction in front of the aircraft's nose. Six o'clock is the blind spot behind the pilot.) In Yellow, you are "taking in" surrounding information in a relaxed but alert manner, like a continuous 360-degree radar sweep. As Cooper put it, "I might have to shoot."

- **Orange** - Specific alert. Something is not quite right and has gotten your attention. Your radar has picked up a specific alert. You shift your primary focus to determine if there is a threat (but you do not drop your six). Your mindset shifts to "I may have to shoot HIM today." In Condition Orange, you set a mental trigger: "If that goblin does 'x', I will need to stop him." Your pistol usually remains holstered in this state. Staying in Orange can be a bit of a mental strain, but you can stay in it for as long as you need to. If the threat proves to be nothing, you shift back to Condition Yellow. Cooper described this as "I might have to shoot HIM," referring to the specific target which has caused the escalation in alert status.

- **Red** - Condition Red is fight. Your mental trigger (established back in Condition Orange) has been tripped. You take appropriate action. Cooper explained this as "I am in the process of shooting, and will only stop if the threat is reduced before the process reaches the point of no return."

The USMC also uses "Condition Black" as actively engaged in combat, as do some of Cooper's successors, but Cooper always felt this was an unnecessary step and not in keeping with the mindset definitions.

Condition black is when you have not prepared yourself for a violent encounter mentally or through self-defense training and now your mind is overwhelmed with stress and both your mind and body shut down to any realistic defensive response. In essence, you become the victim through lack of planning or self defense awareness or planning on your part.

Increase personal security and personal safety by living in Cooper color code yellow to make sure you see any threat to your safety before you find yourself in the middle of a mess and risk injury or death.

APPLYING THIS TO PESD

So, there you have the Cooper Color code. It's meant for physical self-defense, but I apply this to Practical Emotional Self-Defense too. Before I really figured out how to block people I didn't want around from getting into my life and into my head, and figured out that there were things I could *do* about it, I used to *live* in "Condition Red" in my emotional dealings with some people. Living in Red will make you old and tired, fast. If you practice Practical Emotional Self-Defense effectively, you'll rarely have to ever go past Condition Yellow, or Condition Orange at most.

In physical self-defense, you are taught that Condition White is a bad place to live. As I said, it's where people usually are when they get mugged. They're

blissful and looking up or down but not around. They see things, but don't really *see* them. I'm in physical defense Condition Yellow any time I leave my home.

A key to Practical Emotional Self-Defense is rarely going into Condition White. Sure, maybe at home with the phone turned off, spending time with someone you truly love and trust, or working with someone you truly trust on a project, in person, over the phone or online, yeah. But anywhere out in the world, or any time you deal with people you don't know, and especially people you don't trust not to be weenies or SVs, you should be in at least Condition Yellow. Being in Condition Yellow doesn't hurt. You can actually *live* there most of the time without a lot of stress. Condition Yellow is not being paranoid, it's not jumping at everything, it's just being *alert*.

> "Trust" isn't just handing someone your wallet. It's handing them your *heart*.

Michael Bérubé adds this useful info:

> One benefit of Condition Yellow is that it actually allows you to go out and safely and happily engage with the world. It allows you to maintain your intellectual curiosity and your love of life and art and music and everything. Condition Yellow isn't simply or purely a matter of being armed for possible attacks, it's also a way of going out and being in the world so that you can actually have fun and go on adventures and try new things and enjoy yourself. Because, as you know, if you go around in Condition White all the time, you'll wind up overwhelmed and shell shocked, and may eventually decide that the only way to live and stay healthy is as a recluse. And we don't want that!

THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM

The other, and more important, part of Cooper Codes in Practical Emotional Self-Defense is to rarely, if ever, need to go into Condition Red or get caught in Condition Black. Dealing with SVs causes many people to *live* in Condition Red. That hurts your heart, your soul, and will shorten your life. But if you handle yourself correctly, you won't need to go into Condition Red often. That's what we're going to deal with in the coming chapters.

ACTION:

- **Write down the Cooper Color Codes. Hang them on your wall and memorize them.**
- **Write down examples of times you've been emotionally pushed by people past Condition Yellow.**

- **Think about ways you could have avoided it, or even avoided *them*.**

Figure 4.1
Try to avoid ever even *needing* to go into Condition Orange

Chapter 5 – Your Rights End at My Nose

YOUR RIGHTS END AT MY NOSE

I'm very fond of the saying "Your rights end at my nose." (Sometimes also expressed as "Your rights end where my nose begins.") It sums up much of what I believe, and *perfectly* sums up Practical Emotional Self-Defense.

"Your rights end at my nose" is the idea that anyone can do what they want, but when it affects *you*, it borders on becoming, or actually becomes, an initiation of force.

> "Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law', because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual."
> --Thomas Jefferson

AGENDAS IN CONFLICT

You probably have to accept *some* small initiations of force in your life, or at least some compromises, unless you want to live in a cave. Even if you lived in a cave, someone would come by and want something from you or want your cave, and you'd have to defend yourself. Which, of course, would not be *accepting* force, so you'd be OK. Though you might end up dead. (Don't forget that opening scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey*).

The key to living life without too much worry for it to be worthwhile is in *choosing which battles to fight*.

I consider myself *libertarian*, which, to me, is more an all-encompassing philosophical designation than just a political idea. The word "libertarian" means the opposite of "authoritarian." Libertarians are into freedom and personal liberty, and do not like authoritarians imposing restrictions on them.

However, I remember being in Europe and having people who considered themselves libertarians berating me for having Microsoft Windows on my laptop instead of Linux. Because running Windows was "supporting an evil corporation." They, on the other hand, were running "pure" Linux. But they were running it on computers made by huge "evil corporations" and singing anti-government, anti-big business, punk rock protest songs on electric guitars made by huge "evil corporations." And they were often squatting in squalor and eating out of dumpsters because there was no "pure" work to be had.

(I like Linux, but more for security and extensibility considerations than anti-corporate ideals. And I do not dislike corporate commerce, in and of itself, like the anti-Windows folks I'm referring to above.)

Again, pick your battles. Everyone's hands are probably a little dirty in one way or another. It's just a matter of degrees, unless you live in that cave.

But you should not let the phrase "everyone's hands are probably a little dirty in one way or another" be an excuse for bad behavior. Instead, use it as a guideline to *pick your battles*, rather than going mad trying to live completely "pure."

HUMANS AND THEIR AGENDAS

Living in civilized society is a teeter-totter of give and take. All true rights are God given. (If you're an atheist, it works equally well to say "all rights are inherent.") But people with political callings tend to like to put rights *in writing*. Once that happens, everything seems good for a minute. Then someone says, "think of the children!" or just "there outta be a law!" and a new, usually counterproductive, law is enacted. And a God-given right, large or small, is taken away. Historically, this repeats ad nauseum, until the once-free society becomes a totalitarian regime, or dissolves, or is otherwise totally ruined.

More people are born, and live closer together, and things like roads and schools are built "for the good of the community." Pretty soon we are surrounded by so many laws that every single person is probably at least a petty criminal, and may not even know it. U.S. law is so complex that if printed out, it would fill a landfill or three. Even lawyers can't know it all. On top of all the laws, add in all the rules, regulations, customs, social mores and *people just not liking what their neighbors are doing*, even when it's perfectly legal. And the more people there are, especially in one area, the more chance there is for conflict.

The world grows increasingly complex until people aren't smart enough to govern themselves, so they elect people to do it for them. Unfortunately, all too often the people who seek such positions have less-than-wonderful motives and agendas. The same is true of many citizens. Many citizens do not respect the end of *anyone's* noses, even as they're screaming that no one is recognizing how special their own perfect nose is.

The world is a balancing act of give and take, of agendas and demands, of every splinter group demanding rights for their special unique brand of humanity when it should just be based on *human* rights, rather than special rights for every one of the thousands of groups demanding their due. And they often aren't demanding equal rights; they're demanding *special* rights.

Anything that comes anywhere *near* equal (special) rights for The Lobby of Left-Handed Wet Nurses of Massachusetts but also satisfies the demands of The Northern California Union of Abused Adult Codependent Children of Alcoholic Cat Lovers is going to totally step over all the rights of *everyone*.

Noses akimbo, oh my!

People who are decent don't demand that their special splinter group of humans be given special rights. People with integrity keep their own natural rights out of other people's noses, and keep other people's noses out of their own rights.

There are too damn many agendas in the world. Practical Emotional Self-Defense includes *stepping out of the way* of agendas.

One way to deal with this is to move away to a sparsely populated area and live in a house on a large plot of land. That's kinda like living in a cave, but with *some* of the perks of "civilization." (My wife and I are currently working on doing exactly that.)

Or you can learn to live with it. Learning to live with it means learning to manage who you let into your life, and learning to deal with the ones who you do let in, and learning to block people who demand to be in your life regardless of your desires.

> By the way, I think only five things should be illegal: murder, rape, assault, theft and fraud. That covers everything that should be covered. All other laws just make free men into slaves. And all real crimes are covered in this short list. Kidnapping is theft, of your living body. Torture is assault. Arson is attempted murder, or murder, combined with stealing by destroying the property. Dumping battery acid in a river is assault, and sometimes murder. Trespassing could be dealt with by the land owner. Your land, your rules. Most anything else you do, *especially in your home*, is only your business. And we don't need "hate crime laws" because *all* crimes are hate crimes, and crimes are already illegal. Hate crime laws only make someone's "special" nose more important than anyone else's.

MATH WORMS

SVs, weenies and mosquitoes often require "math", as in "mental calculations you have to do to deal with them." I call this brand of human "math worms." They require *math* to be around.

If your life is infested with a math worm, you'll often find yourself thinking things like "Should I call him back? I really don't want to, but if I don't, he'll keep calling. Better to get it over with now, I guess I'll call him." Or "I guess I'd like to see her, but she's so moody. Sometimes she's nice; sometimes she's mean, regardless of what I do. I wonder how she'll act today?"

SVs do not have integrity, because integrity involves respecting other people's "space", be it physical space or emotional homeostasis. It also involves being relatively "even", that is treating people well regardless of whether or not you're in a good mood. People with integrity don't frequently take their moods out on others, and do not weasel into people's lives in a way that makes people want to run away from them. And people with integrity do not guilt other people into being around them.

People with integrity are not SVs. People with integrity do not require much, if any, math. You just dig being around them. They treat you the same regardless of what's going on in their world.

People with integrity intuitively know what to do, regardless of the situation. And they do not have different rules for different people. People with integrity live by The Only Two Rules in Life, *even if they've never heard them expressed as those two rules*. People with integrity use that same integrity when dealing with family, friends, strangers, work, their country, their government, and the world.

Don't do math, GET OUT NOW!

THE DATA TABLE OF LIFE

In 1995, sober for less than a year, I started to dip a toe back into playing music. I still was under the impression that drugs and alcohol were, in and of themselves, evil, as many people in early recovery are. I couldn't be *around* booze, at all. So I surrounded myself mostly with people in early recovery who were as vigilantly anti-booze and anti-drugs as I was. That's a protection mechanism, and people like this often swing the pendulum back to a saner place with time. (This works in recovery from addiction to substances as well as addiction to recovery from people, i.e. recovery from codependence.) For instance, today I can go into a bar if I have reason to. I rarely have reason to, but I can do it if I want, without it being an issue (and without having a drink). My wife and I frequently have dinner in restaurants where the people at the next table are having wine. Not a problem. But in early recovery, any alcohol freaked me out. I viewed it the same way that Superman views Kryptonite.

I remember jamming with this really good guitarist named Rebecca. She brought *one beer* to our practice space, opened it, and sipped it throughout rehearsal.

People who spend two hours nursing one beer are *not* alcoholic. But me and my sober musician friends were freaked out. At the end of practice we "had a talk with her." We told Rebecca, "We really like your playing but don't want to be around beer. When you come back next time, please don't bring beer." She laughed, and said, "OK…Michael doesn't like beer. I'll file that away with other information like what kind of string each of my cats like to play with." She really didn't come off as passive-aggressive or sarcastic. You'd have to know Rebecca's positive energy to really get this, but trust me. She was just doing math.

I had become a "person who requires math" in her life. Rebecca had to alter the equation of who Rebecca was in order to be around me. She had entered a fact about me (a boundary actually) into what I call "the Data Table of Life." But I didn't require much math beyond that, so we kept playing music, until she moved to a different city.

Every person requires *some* math, but some require a *lot* of math. Those are the ones to avoid.

People who require too much math are typically people you have to "negotiate with" even when they don't know you're negotiating with them. Examples: someone who calls you on the phone so much that you duck their calls sometimes, and you make a note to yourself to only talk with them on the phone three times a week. You have to keep track of that. Or someone who keeps track of what you sent them for Christmas and bases your next gift on the dollar value of your last present (and even writes it down!) rather than just giving from the goodness of their heart. Or people who are very moody get mean when they're drunk, or otherwise deal with you differently on different occasions, even if you're being consistent in your treatment of them. With people like that, you not only have to do math to keep it all straight, you have to try to second-guess what mood they're in at any given moment, and what mood they'll be in an hour from now.

The more junk you have to keep track of in the Data Table Of Life, the less mental and spiritual space you're going to have available to do the things you really want to do. And that makes you a less effective human being on the planet Earth.

People who quickly fill up your Data Table Of Life are worth deleting, especially if they fill it up with crap, math negotiations, and cause you to try to duck them. Especially if you're only keeping them in your life because you don't want to be "rude" by asserting yourself, which is no good reason at all.

By the way, no one should routinely leave many many unwanted messages a day on your answering machine (or pager, or e-mail, etc.) unless someone has died or is in the hospital. Avoid people who do this. It's an initiation of force.

"AGAINST THE MAN…"

People with integrity may have disagreements, but these disagreements never degenerate into *ad hominem attacks. Ad hominem* is Latin for "to the man", in the sense of "an argument against the man." It's where someone stops using logic (usually because their logic is losing the argument) and goes after *you*. Many people do this. They'll subtly (passive-aggressively) or not so subtly (aggressive-aggressively) attack you, rather than defending their *idea*. This is to be avoided entirely. Walk away, for good, from people who do this.

Again: people with integrity don't require math to be around.

PREVENTING MORE *MATH WORMS* FROM INFESTING YOUR LIFE:

ACTION:

- **Make a list of people who require math, and write down how little you'd *really like* to be around them, compared to how much you actually *are* around them. Is the ratio something you're comfortable with? (Sorry about the math, but we are dealing with *math* worms.)**
- **Think of how to deal with each math worm. Should you explain yourself? Reason with them? Quit returning their calls? Move far away and leave no forwarding address? Something else?**

  Don't act on it right away. Think it over for a few days or weeks. Observe them, and observe yourself in interacting with them, with your newfound understanding. Then when the time comes to act, you'll be better at intuitively knowing what to do.

- **Look at your list of math worms, and make a shorter list of things that all math worms *have in common*. Use this short list as reference to recognize these types in the future. Practice and become an expert at recognizing them at *first contact*, before they have a chance to worm into your brain and into your life.**

YOUR RIGHTS END AT MY EARS

Blasting hip-hop music (or rock and roll, or Salsa, or anything) is unconstitutional. It's at least unDeclarational. Blasting your music through my

walls and into my house violates the preamble of the Declaration of Independence:

> *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

When you blast music and don't care about me having to hear it, my pursuit of happiness is being infringed because your pursuit of happiness is in my nose (and in my ears).

Making me listen to your music through my walls is a violation of my rights. And again, all rights come from God, not from governments. Documents like the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States simply help (sometimes) guarantee them.

I like loud music. But if I can hear your music inside my home *with my doors and windows shut*, whether you live next door or are just driving past, you're too loud.

I like loud music. I like old rock like Led Zeppelin. I like punk rock like Minor Threat and Rancid. I like some hip-hop. But I like it *when I want to hear it*. Not when *you* want to hear it. I don't blast my music in a way that will disturb you. (I'm very fond of headphones, and have been since about thirty years before iPods existed. I'll give you my favorite headphone recommendation a little later in this book.)

If I feel it's *always* too loud where I am, then my world has become too crowded and I live too close to other people. It is my obligation to myself to work toward living somewhere I can't hear my neighbors fighting in their house. Where I won't be woken up by hip hop (or classical, jazz, blues, country, people fighting, *anything*) blasting from cars in my driveway. Where I can have my *own* driveway, and a lot of land, as a cushion between the neighbors and me.

I'm thinking Wyoming. Because *home is where the rights are*.

> "Michael, I can totally see you in Wyoming. I was there for a few days in 1996, and it struck me as the perfect place for people who find Nebraska and Montana too crowded."
> --Michael Bérubé

HOME IS WHERE THE RIGHTS ARE

Your rights (legally, socially and emotionally) are the strongest in your own home, and on your own property. Even if you rent. But especially if you own.

"Home is where the rights are" is why my wife and I are largely a "nation of two." We actually call our house "Nestlandia", as in "the land of the Nest." We do our world-changing work under the banner of "The Nestlandia Institute Think Tank." Nestlandia is our reality, it's our own perfect little nation of two. It may sound silly that we actually *named* our private world, and that we call it a "nation", but we dig it. Naming it helps us in dealing with an outside world that can sometimes be quite loud, cold, and unfriendly. Once we're home and our door shuts, the world is *ours*.

This mindset can be a valuable tool for dealing with everything.

DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?! (INSIDE THE MIND OF SERENITY VAMPIRES)

"DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?!" is yelled at the beginning of every physical fight, all the world over. It may be in a different wording (like "YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'RE MESSING WITH!"). It may be in a different language, depending on where you are in the world. But it is always the battle cry of SVs who initiate physical force. It's yelled in some form in every grade school recess fist fight, every alley knife fight, and even in wars between nations (at least in offensive, as opposed to defensive, wars). It basically means, "I'm afraid of you and angry at you because you are not worshiping the majesty that is *ME*!"

This is complete disregard for the nose of others. It's also high ego and low self-esteem. When most people "demand respect", they are really demanding fear and compliance.

One cannot *demand* respect; one can only *earn* it. And you don't earn it by yelling. When people say they "demand respect", they're demanding fear. And that is totally an initiation of force.

> Much of what peace officers do with their workday amounts to babysitting idiots who have neither the life skills nor the moral compass to take care of themselves without infringing on the rights of others. If people would police themselves, we wouldn't need nearly as many police. But most people aren't really capable of policing themselves. They've grown up expecting someone else to do it.

MORE PEOPLE EQUALS LESS ROOM FOR MY NOSE

The world was already overpopulated when I was born, and the population has doubled in my lifetime. At the rate things are going, if you're 20, it may double again by the end of *your* lifetime. There are too many people, and we're running out of resources, including livable space. This all just increases everyone's willingness to stab his neighbor in the back in a frenzy of fear that often leads to "DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM??!!?"

HOW THE WORLD REALLY WORKS

Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of human needs"
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hierarchy_of_human_needs
demonstrates that our basic human needs must be met before we can have civilization. You need to build (or buy) a roof over your head, and you need to know that your hut (today, this would be your condo) and possessions will be there when you get home from the hunt (when you get home from the office). Otherwise, you'll have no time, energy, or inclination to "progress" and invent (or buy) more things to fill your hut (condo). This is what separates modern, steadily improving civilization from the hunter-gathers of old.

WHY PEOPLE GET HIGH (on drugs, booze or people)

Once those needs are taken care of, people get a little bored, then they want to *change* things. *Fast*. And repeatedly. Drugs, booze and the codependence of fixing someone else rather than working on yourself are quick ways to do that. (Working on yourself takes time, so doesn't appeal to everyone.) In addiction and codependence, the "high" we get from the substance or people is not sustainable. Addiction and codependence will always "stop working for you", will always eventually progress to the point of removing any solid serenity, employment, shelter, food, love and sometimes even air from your existence. Addictions make you more squitteny and squicky, which tends to get you up into people's noses more, and makes *noses in the mirror of life appear closer than they are*.

> *Squitteny* = me and my wife's term meaning "unpredictable & scared and/or mean."

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF DENIAL

The downward spiral of the diseases of substance abuse and codependence happens so slowly that you do not notice it as it happens. This is also known as "Denial." It's like gaining weight or getting out of shape. It happens slowly, so you don't see it in yourself on a day-to-day basis, but people who haven't seen you in a while notice it immediately.

Getting "back out of the woods" can happen equally slowly. That part is like dieting and going to the gym and getting in shape. It happens slowly, so you don't notice it, but people you haven't seen in a while do.

And to become human again, you will need something to do, and someone to love. (Though at first, you may only need *someone to do*).

Something to do and someone to love will cover your need for things to be the same, and for things to be different, in a positive sustainable manner.

I finally found my something to do after a few years in recovery, by learning to be a writer, then getting good enough at it to make a living. Later I found my someone to love, Debra Jean. (Who also helps me with my something to do! Yay!)

Finding my something to do also covered the third need of living a life of happy recovery (or any happy life): *work*.

DIY OR DIE
HOW TO SURVIVE AS AN INDEPENDANT ARTIST
film de Micheal Wareham Dean
PROJECTION, DEBAT & CONCERT ACOUSTIQUE
MERCREDI 08 OCTOBRE
LE SAINT PIERRE
2, RUE ELISE GERVAIS
20H - PRIX LIBRE
Intimités
création
Danse Arts Plastiques
30 et 31 octobre 2003 à 20 heures 30
Théâtre Marie-Hélène Dasté
Lycée Etienne Mimard - St Etienne

Figure 5.1
Work gives me something to do.
(Poster on left is for a lecture I gave in France at a showing of a film I made.)

Another excellent byproduct of work is this: the more satisfied you are with your work, the less reason you'll have to feel like a victim overall.

ACTION:

- **Without acting like or feeling like a victim, make a list of common intrusions that you usually overlook, times when people are "at your nose" (or in your ears).**
- **Then make a list of things you could do in the future to prevent yourself from having as many people in your ears and at your nose.**

And as we said before, with all your notes, read them a few times over a period of a few days or weeks, to see how your concept of things changes with time. You might want to even make a few quick *notes about your notes* each time you read them to help you see this change.

In the next chapter, "From Netiquette to Restraining Orders", we'll talk about dealing with the people in your life who simply *do not respect the end of your nose*.

Chapter 6 - From Netiquette to Restraining Orders

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TACTICS WHEN DEALING WITH
GOOD PEOPLE, WEENIES, SVs, AND *PEOPLE FROM HELL*

In this chapter, I'm going to give some actual examples of sane ways I've dealt with people, with some useful commentary added after the fact (including what I would do *differently* in a similar situation now, knowing what I know now). The examples are arranged in order from least severe to most severe. The first one is not even dealing with a weenie. It's a simple business letter, to show you my non-PESD state when things are all good. The last is someone who seriously wanted to kill me. I feel this collection of e-mails and retellings of conversations shows a gamut of healthy ways to deal with unhealthy people.

I've changed the names to protect the people I'm talking about (except in the first example, where it was *all good*), deleted a few identifying details, and only included *my* side of the actual word exchange. My words - my right to use them. I do describe what they did and said, how those involved made me feel at the time, and what I did about it.

I put a lot of thought into the examples I chose, and into the order they're presented. I took into account how much mental hell I was put through, if the person was my friend or not, how long I'd known them, and how persistent

they'd been in messing with me, and if they were *physically* dangerous to me or not.

We go here *from mild to wild*. Some of the later examples are intense, so personal that you may feel like a voyeur while reading. That's OK, we haven't used any real names, and this *is* a teaching hospital. You need to be able to look into the heart and brain as we perform surgery to remove the tumor that is the SV.

There are six examples in this chapter. Example Seven is in a different chapter, following this one, the "No-Contact Strategy" chapter. It's a mother who stopped talking to her adult daughter for one year. It *would* go at the end of this chapter in our continuum of least intense to most intense. But it really does deserve its *own* chapter.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL THE SVs?
I give these as examples of strongly stated boundaries, presented in ways that worked for me. I also point out what *didn't* work, and what I would do differently now. Your mileage may vary.

I absolutely do not recommend cutting and pasting my exact wording to *anyone*, for a number of reasons. First, it wouldn't be *you*. Second, someone may get really freaked out and think something's going on if, at some point in their lives, they get two identically worded letters from two different people who don't know each other. They may think you and the other person are conspiring against them.

Thirdly, my goal is never to "give you a fish", it's to "teach you to fish." I'm not showing you these examples to suggest you should do exactly the same in any situation. It wouldn't *work* because these exact situations will likely never be replicated. You will have different situations that require different, but related, action.

And lastly, *I do not give advice, I give "experience, strength and hope."* I cannot give you "advice" for your life because I don't *live* your life.

WHY WE SHOULD BLOCK THE SVs (A REMINDER)
These examples are good general Practical Emotional Self-Defense, which is *always* good LifeAmp, because PESD is good for blocking people, *which makes more time and energy available to you to* ***get things done****.*

Remember, *you don't need to fight people*. The idea is to *block* them. Be like the karate master who lets the other person use their weight against themselves.

Remember SVs *need* a victim. If you refuse to be their victim, all but the most sociopathic people will go elsewhere and find someone who will react and complain. Bullies *like* someone who twitches and twists.

EXAMPLE ONE
Standard business letter, to people I like, and with whom I like working. This is to show you my "baseline." Before administering a lie detector test they ask you a few questions with known answers, like your name, age, job, so they can see what your baseline reactions are to truth. We're not talking about lying here, but we are talking about *stress*, which is what a lie detector measures. Knowing my baseline when things are good will help you to better see my stress as it progresses from Code White to Code Yellow and beyond.

This first letter shows my baseline with two people, one is my co-author on my last book, asking for his approval on an e-mail I'm sending to our project editor. I include a draft, for the co-author's approval, of an e-mail to the project editor at the company that published the book. It's an example of good e-mail etiquette, or "netiquette", in action, in a situation requiring absolutely *no* defense. And that's the goal, to minimize the number of situations that require defense. (Part of that is structuring your life in such a way as to work hard and make choices to end up in situations where you don't *have to* do much active defense, even in your work situations! More on *that* in chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16.)

Howdy Alan,

I wanted to run this by you before I ask Carol. You cool with this?

Hello Carol,

I'm working on my next book. It's about self-help / recovery / time management, called "A User's Manual for the Human Experience."

I want to reprint parts of my "Time Management" section from pp 217-227 of the YouTube book, including the "Dean One-Page plan", into the new book, with a credit of where it was first published.

I believe that putting this section in the new book would help, not hurt, sales of the YouTube book.

I know that Alan and my names are on the copyright for the YouTube book, but I know I should run it by the publisher before excerpting it. Who there would I ask for that permission?

Thank you,
MWD

MY COMMENTS: Easy, breezy, happy and cool. Confident, not cocky. Code White. It has all the information needed by both parties. It's a standard business letter involving two people I trust explicitly. I send and respond to about 40 letters a day as calm and to-the-point as this. It's a big part of what I do, and it rarely gets any more difficult than this.

EXAMPLE TWO
Next is my reply to a really silly question from a casual friend. Nothing horrible here, but I really don't have time to do a lot of this. My friend asked me for a simple way to remember the difference between the words "effect" and "affect."

My reply:

Seriously? I almost laughed out loud when I read this. Not at the thought that you have confusion on this, as I do too, but at the thought of asking someone for a mnemonic device, rather than just figuring one out.

But ok, um....Let's see, I remember the difference by thinking of "guitar effect pedals", those things on the stage in front of a guitarist that he uses with his feet to *Affect* the sound. Don't know if that helps, it seems contrary, but I guess that's how I do it.

8999999999i
(my cat typed that.)
MWD

MY COMMENTS: Certainly not an SV, not quite a mosquito, maybe a baby fly? *Come on man, don't waste my time*! Told him so, but I also answered his question. I probably wouldn't do that for someone I didn't know. I get a lot of e-mails like this. I used to answer them all, but that was really cutting into my time, so I started charging, and direct people to my consulting site:
www.michaelwdean.com
(Note the joke title of the page: "I look forward to helping you with your many problems.")

Some people hire me from that site, others just don't ask me stupid questions again.

It may seem rude to take this attitude, but part of living an effective life is not taking time to help *everyone* with every little thing they ask of you, especially when they could just look it up on Google.

I also left in the part where my cat jumped on the keyboard, because I thought it was funny, and thought the guy would get a kick out of it. He did.

He apologized, but it didn't crush him, nor did I want it to. He never asked me a question like this again, but we're still friends, and we have good e-mail exchanges about more important things.

EXAMPLE THREE
Business letter to popular book-selling site where someone had posted something absolutely false about a book I wrote. Condition Yellow. Still calm, not cocky, not at all snitty to the people at the book site, but it does request *action*, and it got the action I wanted: the libelous review was removed.

The person I am sending the letter to is alright. The person I'm discussing is a weenie.

Hello,

On the review for a book I wrote, "$30 Film School", first edition,
ISBN-13: 978-1592000678
here:
(review URL)

a user named _____,
(user URL)

whose only review is this review, claims "CD with book contains a VIRUS."

This is absolutely false, and I'm willing to submit a book with CD directly from the publisher for testing by your company.

The user writing the review even admits "I am not sure if we purchased it from (your book site), a local used bookstore or if it was given as a gift to one of my kids." So there is no way to know who put what in the CD that came with the used copy he has.

I would like this review removed, as it has nothing to do with the actual book, and is damaging to my professional reputation, damaging to the reputation of the book, and the associated CD, which contains no virus.

Respectfully,
MWD

MY COMMENTS: If someone simply posts a bad review, says, "This book sucks and the author doesn't know what he's talking about", I don't try to get it removed. That's free speech. And it does happen. Every book I've written has about 95% five-out-of-five star user reviews on book-seller websites. The remaining 5% of the reviews slam me. *Me*, not just the book; that is they use an ad hominem argument. This is usually because the user was looking for something else, but didn't read the full description of my book. They didn't want a book on filmmaking that also contains life lessons, they were looking for *Filmmaking for Dolts* and ordered my book by mistake. But if someone posts something that's outright *false*, I'll have it removed.

The site removed the review promptly, and thanked me for alerting them. (By the way, when you honestly mean it, the closing "Respectfully," can work *wonders*.)

I could have directly engaged the weenie, but that would have started a fight, which would have taken up time and energy, and the review would have *still been up on the site*. So I sidestepped him, *removed him from the equation*, and just dealt with the negative impact. I got the exact results I desired, and did so quickly and calmly.

EXAMPLE FOUR
E-mail I sent to an old friend I hadn't seen in a very long time, with whom I'd started exchanging e-mails because we were on the same political web board. Let's call her Veronica. Veronica's cool, but this letter is in reference to an ex-girlfriend who was pretty much nuts. (I know it's not politically correct to use the term "nuts", but I don't care. It fits, at least in the sense of "dealing with her made *me* feel crazy.") But in this case, the nutty woman, oh, let's just call her Eve, made my life hell after we broke up. Threatened to kill me; I ended up calling the cops on her. She's *nuts*. I don't like calling the cops, but it was the only thing that worked to make her go away.)

> Note: if you ever have to call the cops on someone for something like that, call the cops in YOUR town, not in THEIR town. And call the non-emergency number, not 911. Unless it truly *is* an emergency, like they're trying to break into your house.

But maybe a better word for her than "crazy" would be *squitteny* (again – that's "unpredictable & scared and/or mean").

Veronica is a good egg. Eve is a squitteny SV. Eve would have been a "person from hell" if she lived in my town and was still bugging me, but she does not and is not. I just didn't want any old wounds being ripped open.

Veronica,

Eve is a very scary person to me. I would really appreciate it if you didn't mention to her that you ran into me. She's been in and out of mental institutions a lot, and has tried to bring grief into my life. Last I heard from her was when she was leaving many messages telling me "stop stealing my friends and riding my coat tails" and enumerated several people I've done projects with, all of whom I knew before I knew her and/or know independently of her.

Eve came out to see me in Los Angeles, both of us sober, a few years back, before I got married. Eve was very sullen for no reason, and went back home, then called me non-stop and was totally batty. I've known several other people who've had similar experiences with her.

Anyway, I hope she's well, but if we lived in the same town, I'd probably find some way to keep her at least 500 yards away from me.

Eve doesn't live in LA now, does she?

Anyway.....
So, that's that.

Looking forward to seeing you in person again.
MWD

MY COMMENTS: It's impossible to control what others do, we are powerless. We can't demand or legislate politeness or sanity. But it is not out of the question to let someone know that you have an issue with someone they know, to share your boundaries with them. They can't respect a boundary they don't know about. I didn't ask Veronica to take sides, just told her my history with Eve.

Turns out, Veronica contacted Eve the minute she found me on the web board and told Eve "Hey, guess who I just ran into online!" She wrote that to Eve *while I was composing the above letter*! This is *exactly* what I was trying to prevent, but I wasn't fast enough, I was trying to carefully choose my wording. Then Veronica received my e-mail, said, "I had no idea. I won't talk to her about you again. And Eve doesn't live in LA."

Eve didn't contact me. My wife and I went out to dinner with Veronica and some friends, we get along great with Veronica and like talking to her, and have since taken her to the range to go shooting.

(What I might have done differently: written my e-mail more quickly, knowing it might be one time to break my own "write carefully" rule.)

EXAMPLE FIVE - HOW FAR WILL YOU GO WITH BLOCKING SOMEONE?
I have a long-time friend, "Chris." I've known Chris longer than anyone I'm still in contact with. I met him back in community college, we hit it off right away. We're "of the same cloth." Two peas. Fast friends.

Back in the day, when I met him, he played in a band. I just played guitar in my room at that point. Chris taught me a lot about playing in a real, working band. I later was in a popular group, Bomb, that toured the world and did four records, one of them on Warner Brothers. We were really good, and I have Chris partially to thank for help with "getting my act together" musically.

If you wanna take a listen, Bomb's website is www.hitsofacid.com

Chris and I kept in touch. We hung out in many cities over many years, talked often on the phone, and once the Internet happened, we were all about the e-mail, and later Skype.

Skype: free/cheap phone calls over the Internet. www.skype.com

Five years ago, Chris moved to Europe. We still kept in touch. But I recently told Chris I wasn't going to talk to him any more. Here's why:

Chris married a gal in Europe. Let's call her "Peaches."

Chris and Peaches play in a band together. They seem to get along great. I've talked to her and him together, and her alone (if she answers Skype phone when he's not there).

About a year ago, Peaches started being snitty to me. Posting mean comments to me on my blog, sending me snotty e-mails, and worst of all, answering my e-mails to Chris from his account, *as him*, without saying it was her answering. She'd send ad hominem attacks; I'd get a random e-mail from her, sometimes from her e-mail account, sometimes from Chris's account when he'd step out of the room to use the bathroom or feed the cat. I'd get stuff like "Michael, you are a bastard, and I can see why no one likes you." Out of the total blue, for no reason, unconnected to any particular event or e-mail. Sometimes even when I hadn't talked to her in a month and hadn't talked to him in a week.

It really screwed with my sense of trust to randomly get a mean e-mail "from Chris", when he had never been mean to me, ever. He later confirmed via Skype phone that this was her writing *as him*.

It turns out Peaches is threatened by Chris having friends. I had no idea that was the case at first. She doesn't like me even though (or maybe *because*) I've known Chris *since before Peaches was born*. (Chris is 47, Peaches is 25.)

I tried reasoning with her, she came off as a willful child who demanded "free speech" to be mean to me. (It *is* her right to free speech. It's also my right *not to listen,* but she didn't see it that way.) Other times she would be very apologetic, then turn around and slam me the next day, after my guard was down. She was unrepentant and belligerent to me when I asked her and Chris about the attacks. I have thick skin, and can take this from a stranger, strangers are easier to block. But this was from the wife of a really close friend.

It finally escalated to the point that I told Chris (via Skype, not e-mail, so I'd know it was *him*, *not her*), "You're one of my best friends, and I don't want to lose contact with you. But I can't put up with the yo-yo your wife's putting me through. If you get another e-mail address that she doesn't have the password to, I'll keep writing you, but if you won't, I can't keep writing you. I wouldn't ask anyone to choose a friend over a wife, and I'm not asking that. But she's not really playing fairly, so that's the only thing that's going to work."

He said that he understood, that we were still friends, but he did not choose to get another e-mail address. I haven't written Chris in six months, and we used to write or call almost every day, for over two decades.

MY COMMENTS
This story may not seem that intense, it may seem odd that I put it in my progression after a woman I'd had to call the cops on, but this one seemed more intense. The woman in Example Four was pretty much insane, completely unreasonable, but *we weren't very good friends*. She was easy to block. Whereas Chris was one of my best friends in the world, and I'd kept in touch with him longer than I've even known most people. It was very difficult to stop writing him, but I felt it had to be done. And now that it's done, I have my serenity back. I did it in a way that I didn't "lose my best friend." I simply stopped talking to him because his wife's unprovoked verbal attacks were an inseparable part of the deal. I hope that Chris and I are in contact again one day.

OK…moving on...The path gets narrow at this point. We're past the weenies, and even SVs, and entering into the world of HARDCORE SVs - *People from hell*.

EXAMPLE SIX - PEOPLE FROM HELL
In San Francisco I lived directly downstairs from a drunk guy who frequently beat his wife. I hated having to hear it, and called the cops a lot. They'd take him away for the night, then she'd go pick him up at the station the next day.

I was in Condition Red and even Condition Black for three years. In my own home. It was horrible, and a very codependent experience. I was worried about the drinking and rage of a guy whose name I barely knew, who I'd spent about ten minutes talking to, total, ever. His rage became *my problem* simply because he lived above me.

The guy started repeatedly threatening to kill me for calling the cops. The wife even threatened me. I stopped calling the cops on him for a while, because it was making things worse, not better. I figured "Well, they're both adults, fine. You like your games, none of my business." (Even though I could hear it in my apartment – it was *totally* in my nose and ears, so it *became* my business. And them threatening me was also my business.) But then he beat her while pregnant, and after the child was born. Beat her in front of the baby in a one-room apartment. Threw furniture around. Threw the TV. All near the baby. I started calling the cops again, for the kid's physical safety.

One time the guy saw me on the street and said he was going to kill me. He got up in my face and looked ready to swing. I called 911 on a payphone. He hung up the payphone as I was dialing. (By the way, it is a crime to interfere with an emergency call.) He said he was very serious about killing me. His wife was with him and said she was going to kill me too.

The next day I filed a TRO (temporary restraining order) against them, left town for two weeks, then went to court, faced them, got a three-year restraining order, and moved to Los Angeles the next day.

As I said, I hate involving the authorities. I would prefer to settle anything I can without calling in the nanny state to protect me. I'm glad police (the good ones) and courts (the fair ones) exist, but I really try to not need to deal with them. It complicates things. The reason I filed a restraining order was this: the guy was serious about killing me. I felt that if I ever had to injure or kill him in true self-defense, a prior restraining order on record would help me beat unfair prison time for a trumped-up assault charge or manslaughter charge. California is not the best state, prosecutor-wise and jury-wise, in which to have to defend yourself in court after defending yourself out in the real world.

A restraining order takes a lot of effort, and is only, in my opinion, for people who will not stop, are truly dangerous, and live in the same town as you.

Most people are not insane enough to keep pursuing you for long if you ignore them. They want a fight, and will move on to the next victim if you don't feed the beast with negative attention. They want you scared, and if you cease

responding, they aren't getting what they want from you and will look for someone else to twist up.

COMMENTS
My order of escalation for dealing with SVs who are going way out of their way to wrongly impose their will on me is this:

1. Tell them "It's over, please do not e-mail, call, write, or come to my house ever again."
2. Ignore them.
3. Block their e-mail, block their phone number.
4. Have the cops call them.
5. Obtain a restraining order.
6. Move to a different town, legally arm yourself (if you haven't already), and start over.

If step 1 works, fine. If it doesn't, I move down the list.

Usually it never gets past number 2 or 3, unless the person is insane.

> I also keep a log and copies of any of these actions taken, and copies and dates of any annoying contacts or threats. These can come in handy, the further down the list you have to go. If the person is threatening you in person, it can be handy to carry an audio recorder or video camera. Let them know they're being recorded if you do record them, and consider consulting an attorney for the laws on audio- and video-taping in public in your area.

I'd also say, from experience, if you *have to* obtain a TRO (temporary restraining order) you'll have to get it properly served. (Getting the TRO served is the first step in getting a full restraining order, which can be good for three or more years.) Hire a process server, rather than having the cops serve the papers. Cops are not usually very proactive about it. They've got real, current crimes to deal with, and preventing possible *future* crimes is lower on their list, by necessity.

And don't have your cousin or brother or friend serve the TRO. It might invalidate things. It's best to have someone you don't know serve papers. Your cousin/brother/friend may get into it verbally (or physically) with the person from hell, which will not help your case. Also, it is usually a legal requirement that the person serving process is an "uninterested party." And the person serving papers MUST be of legal age.

> NOTE: I am not an attorney, I'm just saying what worked for me. You might want to consult an attorney to see what the legal requirements for a TRO aka VPO (victim protection order) are where you live.

Even if you don't have a stalker, security cameras outside your home are a good idea. They don't cost that much, if you consider their potential value. They are totally worth it. You can see who's outside your house without opening the door and endangering yourself. Also, if someone acts inappropriately or criminally, you'll have solid proof that they were there and did what they did. People lie, cameras do not.

> I'm not an attorney, but in most parts of America, if you record video (but not audio) in an area where people "do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy", you're usually legally OK.

If a stalker showed up at my house, *I wouldn't open the door*. I'd call 911 immediately. If the stalker broke in uninvited, I would defend myself.

> I try to avoid showdowns. They're the last thing I'd want. To truly practice *any* self-defense, you have to be *prepared and willing* to fight. You have to know *how* to fight. You should physically and mentally condition yourself, and regularly practice training scenarios. But you also have to know that fighting is a last-last resort. You do everything you can *not* to have to fight. (Again, this is not only true of physical self-defense, **it's true of PESD too**.)

Courts tend to resist issuing more restrictive restraining orders (longer duration, farther distance the person has to stay away) unless there's an extreme danger to the party seeking the order. The court has to balance one person's (your) right to safety with the other person's (the hardcore SV's) right to travel freely. Think of it this way: the court is being asked to legally restrain someone, someone who *may not yet* have committed a prosecutable crime. Essentially the court is deciding if the "risk" that the person *may* commit a crime is great enough to justify restricting that person's legal right to freedom. That's a pretty tough standard, and if you want things to go your way, you'll need to be very well prepared.

I have gone through the effort to get a restraining order only one time, when there was genuine danger.

Do not argue with the judge, and remain calm. The day I went to court for mine, some people who I think were genuinely in danger did *not* get a restraining

order granted because they didn't have their paperwork in order and/or argued with the judge.

One thing to know: a restraining order will not always restrain a truly unbalanced person. It will sometimes even escalate their actions. However, a restraining order from a judge DOES generally make it easier to prosecute any further serious actions on the abuser's part after the order has been issued.

BOTTOM LINE

I've learned from past experiences, including this one, to try to stay out of pushy people's radar, and have had to become a very good judge of people's personalities and their potential to push.

I make it hard for people to stalk me. I don't even post the *city* I live in on the Internet. My phone number is unlisted. Less than ten people have my phone number, and five of them are family. I love interfacing with the world via the Internet, and in real life with a *very* few special people, but I'm a person who only wants to interact with those who can do so civilly. This helps keep squitteny people out of my hair.

DROP THE ROCK

If the wife-beater neighbor scenario happened to me now, I'd call the police a few times, but I'd *move away* before it got to the point of a restraining order. Back then, I didn't know what I know now, and thought, "It's *my* apartment building! I was renting here first! *He* should move."

There's a story people tell in AA. It goes like this:

> A guy is walking by a lake. From the shore he sees someone holding a big rock and drowning in the lake. Drowning guy yells, "HELP ME!" Guy on the shore yells, "DROP THE ROCK!" Drowning guy says, "BUT IT'S *MY ROCK*!"

In this parable, the rock is the guy's resentments. Resentments are shown in AA, quite correctly, to be deadly to alcoholics. (Though AA says that non-drunks can entertain resentments. I disagree. I believe that holding on to resentments is poison for *anyone*.) When drunks relapse, they're often "drinking at someone" they resent. (How friggin' codependent is *that*?)

My "rock" in this case was my insistence that it was *my* building. That the other guy should move. I had not yet learned the trick used in most martial arts, "Get out of your opponent's way and let him collapse under his own weight." I also

like the story of the willow and the pine tree – the willow bends in the raging wind and survives, the pine resists, cracks apart, and withers.

Letting go of my rock and moving to Los Angeles was the best thing that ever happened to me. I finally started making a living as a filmmaker and writer about a month after I moved there. I'd been working seriously on both for well over a decade. (It probably began to work out for me once I left San Francisco because in that town, it's "uncool" to make money at "art." In Los Angeles, it's encouraged. I am my own person, but *everyone* is influenced to some degree by what's happening around them.)

> NOTE: I said it before, but it bears repeating: The most important part of Practical Emotional Self-Defense is rarely, if ever, going into Condition Red or Condition Black. If you handle yourself correctly, you won't be pushed to. Even if it means leaving your rent-controlled studio apartment and moving to a different city!

AND NOW, A COUPLE OF "UNICORN CHASERS"

> (A "unicorn chaser" is something to get the bad taste out of your mind's mouth.)
>
> From Wikipedia:
> "A 'unicorn chaser' is a concept created by BoingBoing editors as an antidote to…disgusting or shocking images. The antidote contains a picture of a unicorn…."

So, to contrast all these examples of dealing with squicky people, I'm going to give an example of dealing well with someone who could be a hassle if I let him, *but I don't let him*. And he's a good guy, so instead of dropping him from my life, I kept him in, but *on my terms*. Since he comes to me more than I go to him, I can name the terms. And since he respected my terms, I am still in his life.

This friend is about half my age. He's young, still trying to find his way in the world, and has lot of problems with a lot of people. But he has a great attitude, is smart, and has a good heart.

He looks up to me as a mentor. He used to phone me all the time and tell me all his problems. He'd do so without even asking if I was busy, just launch into long descriptions of cyclical "same book, different chapter" life issues. He used to "pop in" to visit my house without calling first. Sometimes he'd call from just down the street, and then be upset if I didn't drop everything and hang out with him. When we did have plans to meet, he often used to show up very late without calling to tell me he was running late.

I finally told him, "I dig being your friend, but you have to call a day before coming by. No more pop-ins. And if we have plans, you have to be on time, or at least call if you're running late. And when you call me on the phone, you have to ask if I'm busy. When you tell me your problems, if it sounds like you're having the same problem over and over with different people, I'm going to cut you off, and we'll talk about solutions, rather than me listening to every detail of your problems."

He was a little taken aback at first. But he respects me, so he follows my rules. I believe he's come to understand my rules aren't punitive, they're just necessary to maintain my orderly existence. We now have a very reasonable relationship, and get along well.

ONE MORE

I'll close with another "unicorn chaser", someone who doesn't require any "math." My wife. We get along great. We're best friends and laugh and hang out all the time.

We both had to go through a lot of "practice relationships" before meeting, both to *refine who we are*, and also to *know what we were looking for*. We finally found each other, and it's magic. She's my helpmeet, and I'm her protector.

CONCLUSION

The point of Practical Emotional Self-Defense is not to block out the world and be a recluse. The point is to eliminate the SVs, minimize the weenies, and have a great life. Because you need to have your mind free to be ready to truly change the world, to come up with something great, to *live* your full potential.

That doesn't mean you don't do life-on-life's-terms tasks. You can be "successful" and still do your own laundry. In fact, mindless daily tasks can be good meditation. But arguing with the lady who runs the Laundromat, or doing the laundry for your lazy adult kids who could do it themselves, well, that's just plain silly.

Changing the world requires intelligence, mental poise, and an ability to connect a million seemingly unrelated things, and the ability to decide *what's useful and what's not*. Then you take the bits that *are* useful, and connect them *in new and useful ways*, and present the result well.

> Also, being able to write a good press release doesn't hurt! If you want to see an example, I think the one for this book on the website

is pretty good. And if you heard about this book, the press release probably worked.

As for "connecting unrelated things in new ways", picture the guy in that movie *A Beautiful Mind* with all the pieces of paper and bits of string…looking for important connections that few can see. That's me. (Except I'm not nuts.)

I want you to be this brilliant. And the universe wants you, nay, *needs you*, to be this brilliant. Or at least to give it a shot. You should try to be that driven and that effective and do something great.

Weenies & SVs will distract the mind from finding the important connections in life. If you're distracted enough, you won't even know the connections exist to look for them!

You can't be your best while dealing with weenies in your head and in your life. Delete them! Take no prisoners, because you don't *want* prisoners. Jailers are not free, they are kept in prison by their daily need to manage their prisoners. (And also, their prisoners often want to kill them.) You want to be free.

Cut the SVs out of the equation, show them the door, and nail the door of codependence shut.

ACTION:

- **Make a list of people you could deal with differently, and how you could deal with them.**
- **Then deal with them.**
- **Or *stop* dealing with them, if that's the best way to deal with them.**

Next: an even more extreme example, the one that deserves its own chapter.

Chapter 7 – The No-Contact Strategy

EXAMPLE SEVEN– ADULT PARENTS OF CODEPENDENT ADULT CHILDREN

My hope in sharing the knowledge and experience in this book is *not* to divide the world. Some people may think I'm a little too hardcore, that I "go too far." Well, I don't. Life is short and you should not spend it hoping bullies will finally leave you alone. They won't *unless you take the right steps* to route around and block them.

My goal is not to divide families. It's to *unite* families by helping people put up reasonable, solid boundaries. The family unit is great, it holds the world together, but sticking with family *at all costs* is sometimes worse than walking away. And you can always *make your own family*, with people you'd *want* around you, rather than enduring toxic people you feel you're "stuck with" just because you share some DNA.

Everyone on the planet shares some DNA.

I go a little further in this chapter than many "light and fluffy" books which are published by the Recovery Industry about family relationships. But the Recovery Industry doesn't want to scare you off. They want to keep things light, *keep you coming back*, keep taking your money. That's the nature of any industry: repeat sales.

> This is not true with all business, but is true with all *industry*. Industry is a pipeline that costs so much to run that it must be continually filled with *something* to turn a profit. This isn't a bad model for some things, but it's a bad model for dealing with people's mental and spiritual wellbeing.

Sometimes light and fluffy *just does not work*. Sometimes you need to get heavy, to deal with heavy SVs.

ME TIME

A no-contact strategy is sort of like a do-it-yourself restraining order, albeit without the muscle of the courts and cops to back it up. With a no-contact strategy, *you* provide the muscle, with your own willpower. You tell the SV "I will not contact you, nor allow contact *from* you, for X amount of time." (Usually a year.)

Our use of the word *Strategy* in the phrase *No-Contact Strategy*, rather than calling it an *order*, *agreement*, etc., is because it is *not* an agreement. It is *not* a contract. It *does not* go two ways. It's something *you* institute, and *you're* responsible for maintaining it, at least your end of it. Because SVs do not, by definition, follow rules or agreements.

> We often use the shortened phrase "no-contact" rather than "no-contact strategy", as in "the mother put a no-contact on her daughter."

WHO THIS STRATEGY IS FOR, AND WHO IT'S *NOT*

A no-contact strategy is *not* for human creatures who are physically dangerous. You need to cut that type out *forever*.

A no-contact *is* for people you'd eventually like to repair your relationship with, but with whom things are going *too badly to keep trying now*. A no-contact is a *loooong* "time out" for *people you love* who are simply horribly emotionally destructive, but do not see anything wrong with what they're doing. It's also for people you love who *do* see something wrong with what they do, *promise over and over to change,* but who *never do change*.

People you *don't love*, who are only emotionally horrible, well, you just delete them for good. That's different than a no-contact.

A no-contact is for people who are "screaming for vengeance when they should be begging for mercy." It is bumptious of them to think it's OK to make your life hell and demand, "YOU NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO ME! YOU OWE ME APOLOGIES! I HAVE THINGS TO SAY! EVERYTHING IS YOUR FAULT!" That is an ongoing initiation of force.

Hardcore SVs thrive on chaos. They do not feel good unless they're making someone's life hell. They're the center of their own universe, a black hole vortex that sucks all light and good out of anything near it.

A no-contact gives you some time and peace of mind to reflect. It also lets the SV know you're serious. It's a very solid boundary line in the sands of life.

TAKE YOUR VORTEX ELSEWHERE

The goal with Practical Emotional Self-Defense in general, and in particular with a no-contact, is not to destroy the person. A no-contact is not abortion in the 100th trimester. It's not even meant to hurt their feelings. It may, and probably will, hurt the feelings of the recipient, but that's not the goal. It's you simply telling them, "Take your vortex elsewhere. Good luck with it, but I no longer want you spinning near me, sucking me in."

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

This chapter is an example of a no-contact done right, including what lead up to it, and what happened once it was correctly in place. We also point out a few mistakes that occurred along the way, and what could have been done differently.

This chapter-long example is from a friend of mine, someone I helped with guidance. We'll call her "Celeste." Celeste is a single mother of two now-adult children, a son and a daughter. The daughter is "Jessica."

(Some of this is so intense, and seems so personal that you may feel unpleasant while reading it. That's OK, this *is* a teaching hospital. And I haven't used any real names or identifying details, I am only sharing the letters of the person initiating the no-contact, and do so with her permission.)

THE BACKSTORY
Jessica and her mother, Celeste, fought a lot. They were not good for each other. Jessica lived at home until she was 25. Jessica is now 28.

A decade ago, Celeste had a nervous breakdown from the stress of raising two kids alone, and the aftermath of a failed marriage. The father was a drunk. Celeste had enough guts to kick him out and file for divorce when the kids were five and seven, but did not have enough gumption to kick Jessica out at 18, even though she was emotionally bad for Celeste. Jessica lived with her mother, rent free, didn't help much around the house, yet complained frequently. Jessica blamed most of the difficulties in her life on other people, particularly her mother. Celeste felt bad about the failed marriage to the drunk, believed it when Jessica would say everything was Celeste's fault, and allowed her daughter to keep reinforcing this.

One of Jessica's favorite defenses was *changing the subject*. When accused of something she had genuinely done wrong (lying, stealing her mother's clothes, etc.), she would lie. When cornered in the lie, she would say things like "Well, you woke me up with your music last month" or something else equally non-sequiturial. *This is a very common tactic of SVs.*

Celeste had done the best she could raising two kids on her own. But even so, she felt guilty for what she saw as depriving her kids of their father, even though he was bad for her and bad for the kids. She stopped taking care of herself to have more time and energy to throw herself entirely into the codependent and unreachable goal of trying to be the *perfect* caretaker for her children. She thought of nothing but them, to the point of *not having a life herself*. She gave up attending any social functions, had few friends and no boyfriends. She was celibate for 13 years.

Even so, Jessica accused her of not being a good mother.

Jessica remained sullen and was rarely appreciative. Any compliments that she ever gave her mother were generally followed by "…but you really should/shouldn't…(insert any litany of complaints here)."

When Jessica was 20, and her brother was already out of the house, Celeste finally started dating. Jessica was furious. She hated all the men and was rude to them, and cruel and judgmental to her mother for "abandoning me" and "being a tramp." Mother and daughter fought even more.

Jessica moved out more than once, but always came back when things "didn't work out." Celeste always let her daughter move back in, even though nothing had changed.

When Jessica was 25, Celeste met David, a man she grew to truly love. David was kind, emotionally strong, and good for her. He was supportive of Celeste and loving. He challenged her mind, something she'd found lacking in the other men she'd previously dated.

Celeste decided to move her lover in so they could spend more time together. She gently gave Jessica three months' notice, Jessica angrily moved out in two.

Celeste's son also did not initially accept the new man in his mother's life. David tried, and was decent to both of Celeste's offspring. Eventually the son warmed, and became close with David. Jessica started to hate David, and became even meaner to her mother.

Celeste finally began to learn about the disease of codependence. She learned that she didn't have to "take crap" from someone just because that person was family. Especially since they were all adults.

After getting into recovery, Celeste made amends to her daughter and son for what she felt were shortcomings she'd had while raising the children. The son simply thanked and hugged her, graciously. Jessica thanked her mother, but then began rehashing and enumerating how horrible all those shortcomings were. This not a decent acceptance of amends.

Even after moving out, Jessica continued pushing all her mother's buttons. Jessica would loudly rage on the phone, half apologize, then quietly rage, *not* apologize, and so on. And on and on and on….

Jessica would take Celeste out to dinner, during which Jessica would usually complain about her own life, and sap Celeste's serenity by continuing to subtly (and sometimes not-so-subtly) blame her many problems on her mother.

Celeste tired of this and stopped being proactive about calling Jessica. It got to the point where Celeste didn't enjoy much of anything about seeing her daughter. Celeste would put up boundaries, but wasn't yet strong enough to keep them up when they were continually knocked down by Jessica.

POINT OF NO RETURN
Jessica tired of being ignored, and tried to blackmail her mother, threatening to tell an old secret Celeste had to Celeste's own parents if Celeste didn't "get in line" and "be a good mother" (i.e., do the old dance of meeting regularly and putting up with her, accepting the guilt trips and demeaning judgments, and giving Jessica money whenever she asked for it).

Celeste had told her daughter the secret in confidence. It was a slap in Celeste's face that Jessica was using it as blackmail fodder. Remember: people with integrity do not tell other people when someone says "keep this a secret." People with integrity *especially* do not blackmail people. And certainly not their *mother*.

Celeste took away the blackmail power by telling the secret to her parents on her own. Her parents weren't shocked and said, "If it isn't illegal, immoral or fattening, it's none of our business." Celeste's parents are pretty cool.

Jessica was *livid*. She continued to rail at Celeste, blamed most everything wrong with her life on her mother, then ran to friends and strangers, "hand stapled to forehead", playing the victim.

The point to note here is that Celeste no longer wanted to "do the dance" with Jessica. But Celeste didn't say, "Go away, I'm done with you", rather she tried to do so with her inaction by not initiating. That is a half-measure, but it's certainly a start.

At this point, the dance started to shift. Celeste did not want Jessica's initiations of force, and Celeste kept them coming anyway. Therefore Jessica was breaking the first rule of The Only Two Rules in Life. And she was breaking it *hard*.

> THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT: If you tell someone to stop harming you, and they do not, *they are initiating force*. Once you've told them to stop and they continue, any Practical Emotional Self-Defense is *fair game* on your part.

Remember:
THE ONLY TWO RULES IN LIFE:

- **Do not initiate, or accept, force.**
- **Keep your word.**

The one thing Celeste did wrong at this point was to continue to meet with her daughter, take her calls, thereby tacitly accepting her emotional abuse. Celeste failed to solidly make her boundaries known, and hoped that since she had taken the first step of "admitting she had a problem", things would just "work themselves out."

This is what's known as "magical thinking." It's like meditating on pictures of puppies or angels to solve all your problems.

Magical thinking is different from having a positive mental attitude. Having a positive mental attitude is a good thing. Magical thinking is *living in denial*. Magical thinking *does not work*. You can spend plenty of good money on books and CDs and DVDs and seminars and retreats that will tell you magical thinking *does* work, but there are much better things you can do with your money.

HEADED TOWARD THE NO-CONTACT
Jessica finally tried for some real boundaries, but unfortunately did not *enforce* them. Here's a letter Celeste wrote a little while before the no-contact, trying for some boundaries:

Jessica,

When I read the beginning of your e-mail, I thought maybe you'd had a change of heart. Then I read further and realized that nothing has changed, and you're still trying to guilt me and run my life. You have no right to do either.

I will not allow you to dictate the terms of a relationship with me. There's no meeting you halfway if you continue to insist that I change who and what I am. If we are to have any relationship at all, you cannot sit in judgment of my choices that do not affect you. I'm not a minor child. You're not my mommy. I'm an adult, you're an adult, act like one and mind your own business.

You implied my parents would be shocked if they knew my "secret", implying you planned to tell them. But it is not your place to talk to Grandpa (or anyone) about what I do. However, to that end, I recently called my Dad and told him myself, to remove your blackmail power. He and I had a great conversation. Dad's fine with my right to make my own choices.

And since you are complaining about your mom to other people, who don't know me, you may be getting some pity mileage out it, but it's at your own expense, and you should know that people will tire of hearing about it.

I love David dearly and will not let anyone come between us. Yes, as you said, you *have* been my daughter longer than he's been my soulmate, but people *choose* their soulmate, they do not choose their children. Someday you will have both, and you will understand this.

Enough is enough. I am finished with you trying to "correct" me and make me be something I'm not. You should just stop, it's not going to work. Ever.

Your brother was a snit to David early on, but stopped long ago, and now they get along, and have really good, long chats.

You act as if I spend many hours a week crafting my life entirely to harm you. I don't. My life is mine. It's not yours, and you have no claim on it. It's not for you, it's for me. I own it. You own your life. Go make your own life work.

You should take the futile energy you're putting into trying to censor my life, guilt me, punish me, and instead put that same amount of energy into creating your own path. You'll feel a lot better.

You said, “I didn’t want to sound selfish….” But you do sound selfish.

You said we were just talking of your feelings and values, that I should think of how you feel.

We are not talking about your feelings and values. WE are not talking. YOU are venting AT me. I have stepped away.

And it's not about values. It's about your resentments, and your dissatisfaction with life, but you are choosing to point it at me, and cloak it all in some self-serving and self-deceiving belief that you're really acting out of concern for me.

You say the way I live my life offends you. You seem to think all your protests about me and my life are motivated by some impulse to convince me to "do what's right - do what's healthy." How dare you?! You have no idea how I feel, how happy and content I am. It seems that, in your eyes, I will always be a broken and unhealthy person, and one who needs you to tell me what's the right way to live. You're wrong. I'm doing just fine.

As my daughter, I hope you can one day find happiness and calm in your life. But what I do is none of your business, and I will not stop doing it. It is completely fulfilling. You claiming that I'm interfering with your happiness is self-indulgent hogwash. It's self-pity victim b.s. I wish you peace, but I will not war with you. If

there's a war, it's all in your head. You said you didn't want the hatred we have going on now, but there is no hatred on my end. I have already stepped out of your line of fire, and will not be dragged back into it. If you're still at war, it's only with yourself.

You wrote that you needed me as a mother. That you had accepted I would never be the mother you envisioned, but you'd rather have me as I am than not have me at all.

It's entirely your choice if we have any kind of relationship. But I don't believe you when you say you'll accept me as I am. I'm willing to try to have a relationship with you, but only if you are decent. And being decent includes completely dropping any criticism (direct or hidden) of my healthy life choices. You should know it will be immediately apparent to me if we meet and you're still playing the same games. Play games, and I will leave. Your brother truly accepts me for who I am, doesn't blame me for his troubles, and is decent to me and to David, which is why your brother and I still talk and spend time together.

I cannot spend any time with anyone who constantly damns things that define me to the core. I'm living my dreams, I have literally never been this happy, and you trying to sway me otherwise is as welcome as a persistent mosquito. Your tantrums have ceased being able to sway me to meet your impossible demands. Your demands and tantrums will only drive me further and further away from you. You've come very close to the point of no return with me. Where you go next is your call.

I'm done playing your game with you. This is the last reply I'm going to give you, ever, on the subjects of my art, my man, my lifestyle and your perception of my failure as a parent or as an adult.

There seems to be no room for acceptance in your heart and mind. I've explained myself, I've defined my boundaries, and anything more would simply be repeating myself.

--Mom

Celeste's eloquent "declaration of independence" didn't work. Jessica reminded aloof and snitty to Celeste and her new husband. (Oh yeah, Celeste married the guy. They were very happy, except whenever Jessica would storm into their lives, which she did frequently, with no warning, breaking the calm with her emotional gyrations and unreasonable demands.)

Jessica even told Celeste "I'm never speaking to you again, and you and your husband will never meet my children." (Jessica did not yet have children, or even any potential father of her children, anywhere on the horizon. She was using the threat of banning access *to children who didn't even yet exist*!)

> Celeste did break my earlier rule of "don't call a mosquito a mosquito", but she'd never heard that rule. Overall, she was doing a pretty good job with her wording, despite that one little detail. And Jessica was far beyond a mere *mosquito*. Celeste was being kind in *only calling her that*, and in keeping things civil overall when many people wouldn't.

BOUNDARIES *STILL* NOT KEPT

Jessica did not "never speak again" to Celeste. (If only!) It was yet another of Jessica's empty threats. Jessica showed up with "the same old thing in a new coat of paint", the "same book, different chapter", a couple months later…more new hampering from the same serenity vampire.

And Celeste did not hold up her healthy boundary of "This is the last reply I'm going to give you…."

People often make demands, set boundaries and *then ignore them when a new chance to fight comes up*. That's a *problem*. People are so used to this toxic dance that they can't see life *without* that dance. That's old behavior. It's the mutually poisonous activity of people who have only ever learned to live in a whirlpool of codependent hell.

It takes two to tango….

THE DANCE GOES ON….

Celeste's line in the sand of "…I've defined my boundaries, and anything more would simply be repeating myself," *would* have been very healthy, *if she'd kept to it*. But when Jessica came back with more yelling, Celeste *kept reacting*.

Doing this shows the SV that you aren't serious, and that you can still be manipulated. It shows the person you are still willing to be a target, a doormat, and that you're still willing to tango.

Jessica didn't contact her mother for a spell, but then reemerged after the few months of silence, called her mother without warning, *acted like nothing had happened*, and was sweet, *while asking her mother for a favor*.

Celeste tried to get even more serious, even though she was still "doing the dance." She sent this letter to Jessica:

Hello,

I can't help but wonder if you know how surprised I was to hear from you the other day.

Considering I had no reply from you since June, I thought perhaps you had just decided we were too far apart in our beliefs to communicate in any meaningful way, and I half-expected I wouldn't hear from you for a long, long time.

Then you call out of the blue, asking me for a favor. Wow. Caught me rather off-guard. I thought I had been clear about my unwillingness to have any relationship with you, let alone do any favors, unless and until you had shown me that you were willing, and ABLE, to go about a relationship on a calm, adult, peaceful and non-judgmental basis.

You chose not to address the issues I put forth in my last letter, made no mention of the problems between us, and called only because you wanted something. This makes me think you have not had any real change of heart.

You need to understand you truly hurt me.

What I am saying is that if you think we are going to have any kind of relationship beyond mutual avoidance, I need you to take some time, a few days, whatever, and WRITE to me, explaining where you are, how you feel about our issues, past, present and future. Take your time, and be thorough.

Once I can understand what's on your mind, I can decide if there's any basis on which I can accept opening myself up to you, and the potential of your future hurtfulness.

I don't wish you ill. I only wish good things for you. But I will not take the risk of being any part of your joys or problems if I believe you might lash out at me, or David and me, again. The consequences of your acrimony are not worth the risk of trusting you too soon.

--Mom

Jessica never responded to this letter, and Celeste allowed the infrequent, strained if not outright difficult, contacts to continue.

> Celeste felt comfortable sending e-mails because she could think about exactly what she was saying, and how to say it. It removed the "heat of the moment" errors people can make in person when angry. But sometimes things need to be much shorter, much less philosophical, and done face to face.

BOOM!

Celeste finally had enough. She decided on a no-contact. She'd tried everything else and nothing had helped, so *all there was left to do was step away* and *keep to it*. Celeste still loved her daughter, but didn't much *like* her anymore, and hadn't in a long time.

HOW IT WORKS

When you enact a no-contact, you tell the SV you will have no contact with them whatsoever for a set period of time. During that time, you do not answer the phone, read e-mails from them or listen to phone messages from the person. You don't let them on your property, in your house or in your head. You keep them *out* of your head. For one year. Less than that does not give you (and the SV) enough time to really assess the situation. Less than that is not enough time to grow. More than a year might seem "cruel and unusual punishment."

After the year, you contact the person, and see if anything's changed. If it has, you very cautiously go have coffee with them, in a public place where they can't make a scene without witnesses, and assess the situation. If there has been a genuine spiritual transformation in the person, you cautiously try having a relationship, after clearly stating your goals. If nothing's changed, either at the end of the year, or after a cautious re-attempt at a relationship, you can either extend the no-contact, or make it permanent.

RESETTING THE CLOCK

The problem with a no-contact is this: What if the SV ignores it and contacts you anyway? Well, Celeste came up with a great addition, which I really like. She added *The Clause*. The Clause is this: "If you contact me before the year is up, the clock starts over."

> NOTE: Do not block the SV's phone number or automatically send all their e-mails to your spam folder, because if you do that, you will not know if they break the no-contact. Blocking phone and e-mail should be saved for later, for permanent no-contacts if the one-year no-contact does not work.

THE FINAL STRAW

None of the eloquently stated boundaries from Celeste worked, because she didn't follow through on them. Jessica remained a particularly tenacious serenity vampire. She still felt she was owed the world, and everything was someone else's fault. She would not apologize, or even discuss, and furthermore, *still insisted* on being in Celeste's life, where she was starting to be most unwelcome.

They say there are two kinds of bullies in the world. The kind who beat you up and take your lunch money, and the kind who bump into you intentionally, spill their own milk, then sue you (figuratively) to get your lunch money.

Jessica is of the latter variety.

ESTABLISHING THE ACTUAL NO-CONTACT

Celeste decided to do a one-year no-contact. She did not do it in a letter. She did it in person.

Celeste called Jessica and asked her to meet her the next day. Celeste didn't tell her on the phone what was up, or that anything was out of the ordinary. Celeste met Jessica in a public place where Jessica couldn't make a scene (but Celeste spoke quietly enough that she wasn't sharing their issues with the room). Once there, Celeste told Jessica briefly that a no-contact was in effect.

Celeste told her daughter, "Things haven't worked out, you're still disrespectful to me and David. I'm not going to have any contact with you for a year. I will not answer your calls or read your e-mails. You will not come to my house. You will not entice anyone else to contact us on your behalf, or cause any problems with my parents and me. If you do any of that, or contact me or David, the clock starts over, and I'll start counting the year again. I need to do this for my sanity. Thank you."

Then Celeste got up and walked away. She cried in the car on the way home, and a few times since, but is much happier overall. By far. And she didn't cry because she put up boundaries, she cried because, "I can't believe I let it come to this and go this far. I should have done this *long ago*."

> Celeste probably should have initiated the no-contact after her daughter ignored the first letter. But like they say, "better late than never."

HAPPY ENDING

Celeste is happier, and her marriage is blissful now. She's spends her newfound "me time" living her life and enjoying her marriage to David. She spends some time continuing to work on recovery, reading a lot about codependence and arming herself emotionally. This is both for when the year no-contact is up, and for the rest of her life, *regardless of what happens when the year is up*.

It's now many months into the no-contact. Jessica has not contacted Celeste so far, so Celeste hasn't had to "restart the clock." Celeste still talks to her adult son, but Celeste has a "no passing messages to and from your sister" rule.

Celeste and her husband are much happier. Celeste has no idea if Jessica is happier, but that's not Celeste's business.

Such is the nature of a no-contact.

> **ACTION:**
> - **Consider if there's anyone in your life with whom you should initiate a no-contact. Think about it long and hard, it's a serious measure.**
> - **Ask yourself if you'd be willing to do it.**
> - **More importantly, ask yourself if you'd be able to *maintain* it.**
> - **Think about possible outcomes, but don't worry about the SV's feelings. You're protecting *yourself*, the other person's feelings are their problem, not yours.**

Make some notes. As always, writing things down, instead of just thinking them, can be very helpful.

OK, let's learn more about Practical Emotional Self-Defense in dealing with people, places and things, and also learn a little bit about the "happy work" part of LifeAmp, in the next chapter, "A Resentment and a Coffee Pot."

Chapter 8 - A Resentment and a Coffee Pot

SUBSTITUTE ME BABY, ALL NIGHT LONG

There's a lot in this chapter (and this book) about "alcoholism" and "addiction." If you're not a recovering drunk or drug addict, substitute the word "codependence" (or whatever your biggest addictive problem is) for the words "alcoholism" and "addiction" and substitute the word "people" for the words "alcohol" and "drugs." This might make more sense to you, if codependence is your main problem and relief from SVs is what you seek.

> TIP: You *could* download the PDF of this book from the website or BitTorrent for free, highlight the entire text, paste into your word processor and use the "search and replace" function to actually, physically, *replace* the word "alcohol" with anything you like. Try doing *that* with the print-only "treeware" AA or NA book! You can also make new versions of this book and remove the parts you don't like, as long as you attribute as directed in the front matter, and give away, not sell, the resulting remix. You could do this to make shorter books for homeschooling, removing any parts that you don't think would be appropriate to the age you're teaching.

WHAT IS ADDICTION?
Addiction is the disease; drug abuse, drink abuse or toxic relationships are simply different *symptoms*. The prescription for all is the same: change your outward behavior, then change your internal wiring. And continue to do so on an ongoing, daily basis.

YOU'LL DIE WITHOUT THE GROUP?
AA saved my life, but it really just started to feel like "robot classes" after a decade or so. I moved on.

Many in AA will tell you, "You *will* relapse if you stop going to meetings", and maybe they're right. Some people do. But some don't. AA members often espouse, promote and encourage the idea that "you'll die without the group."

That's seems like it's own kind of codependence, and I don't need that.

> People in AA may read this book and say "We'll save a seat for you." (This sounds loving, but is often a passive-aggressive way of saying "We know you'll be back, because our way is the *only* way….")
>
> Thank you for thinking of me, but *please*, give my seat to someone who needs it.

GRAD SCHOOL OF RECOVERY AND LIFE
Laying some groundwork in AA, NA, Al-Anon, CODA, SLAA, etc., can be a good thing. (As can rehab, either inpatient or outpatient, to break the cycle of toxic behavior, so you can even begin to consider recovery, which starts *after* you kick your habit.)

I did outpatient rehab. It worked the third time I tried. Not only was I more "ready" by then, but I was also willing to actually go to outside (12-step) meetings by that time, rather than just signing off the attendance cards myself like I'd done the first two times through rehab.

Meetings helped. But I don't buy the idea of me needing to go to daily meetings *for the rest of my life*.

I really don't recommend "recovery without meetings" for hardcore substance abusers and deep codependents until they've been sober in meetings for a while. I see leaving meetings, and continuing work on my own, as my "grad school", something that only worked for me after years of working a program in 12-step

meetings. I look at it like going to a nutritionist when you have high cholesterol. The nutritionist spends some time teaching you how to live better, then after a while, you don't need to go to the nutritionist any more.

IS THIS *STEALING*?

Not everyone can evolve beyond meetings, and some meeting goers say that if you try, you're "stealing" by not "giving back in the fellowship that saved your ass."

I gave back in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and NA (Narcotics Anonymous) for more years than I was there taking. I cleaned ashtrays, swept floors, made coffee, brought the cookies, did commitments at the group service representative level, and even started a meeting (the "Lust for Life" NA meeting in San Francisco, which ran for ten years). I was invited to speak at many meetings, had a year-long commitment taking speakers into the county jail, and put in two years taking speakers into a recovery facility for teen boys who all had felonies under their belt. Those last two were rough gigs, and not for the faint of heart.

I also sponsored a lot of people. I usually sponsored the unsponsorable – people who had been "fired" by other sponsors. Many of my sponsees still relapsed, but a few told me years later that even though they relapsed, me sponsoring them when no one else would made them feel welcome and made them able to come back later, when they were ready.

I look at my service in AA and NA almost like I would view volunteer military service. Not as important as military service, for sure, but I was "in the trenches", did my time, saved some lives, then came back and lived my own life.

And I still do some "recruiting" for AA and NA. I frequently get calls from friends, or friends of friends, saying "I can't get sober and I was told you did, what should I do?" or I get the call on behalf of someone's husband, wife, son, daughter, boyfriend, girlfriend or friend. I talk to the friend, then talk to the addict/drunk/codependent (if they're willing to talk), and tell them what worked for me. And I usually suggest that they go to some meetings for a while. (AA/NA/Al-Anon or CODA, depending on their problem). But I also tell them that I don't go to meetings anymore, and I'm still sober and living a good life. A few people actually were able to go to meetings because of that. They'd previously written off the idea, because it terrified them, as one put it, "to have to trade my drug addiction for a meeting addiction."

RESENTMENT AND A COFFEE POT

In 12-step fellowships they say, "All you need to start a meeting is a resentment and a coffee pot." (That's an honest bit of dark humor. 12-step fellowships

rightfully stress that unchecked resentment is often what kills alcoholics, by driving them back into the bottle.) Many meetings are started because somebody didn't like someone else's way of doing things, and decided, "I can do that better." (Or even just "I can do that *differently*…I can do it *my* way, even if it's not better.") So they took their resentment, got a coffee pot, and started a new meeting. That's how I started the "Lust for Life" meeting. I thought other meetings didn't have enough "hipsters" (back when that mattered to me), so I started a hipster meeting. It kept me off drugs, and helped a lot of other people who might have not felt comfortable in the existing meetings in San Francisco at that time.

The "resentment and a coffee pot" idea doesn't only work for creating new meetings. Some 12-step *fellowships* start the same way. Lore repeated in many NA meetings states that NA started because in the 1950s, members of AA didn't like it when junkies started showing up at AA meetings. Addicts made some AA members feel uncomfortable, so with AA's blessing, the recovering drug addicts appropriated the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions and started their own fellowship.

WELCOME TO MY COFFEE POT

A User's Manual for the Human Experience in general, and this chapter and the next two chapters in particular, are my "resentment and a coffee pot."

I have no real "resentment" against any 12-step fellowship. I met some *people* I didn't like but that's not the *fellowship* itself. The *fellowships* are sound. I just moved on because the 12-steps and meetings didn't solve all my problems. I felt there were some great ideas there, but I incorporated them with some other things, rather than doing it all with only the 12 Steps and only with "the program." I took their advice of "take what you need and leave the rest", and I graciously went away.

ALL I NEED TO CHANGE THE WORLD IS A RESENTMENT AND A LAPTOP

I guess the "resentment and a coffee pot" idea could be said to be the basis of most things that start in a grassroots way and spread…many great things are started with a resentment. America, for one. America started as a resentment against the British for taxing without asking, and for trying to take away the colonists' ability to defend themselves. (More on this in "Letter to a Young Me.")

> I am *not* saying that this book is as great as America, but this book is *still* a good thing. Tell two friends. "Pass it on."

ARE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL "BAD?"

Despite common thought, drug and alcohol abuse is *not* a "moral" issue. It's a chemical issue, a personality makeup issue, and maybe a spiritual issue.

I personally don't think that drugs should be illegal. The "War On Drugs" causes far more problems than it solves. And I know that some people *can* use intoxicants in moderation. But I know some people *can't*. I'm one of them. I can't have "just one", of anything. When using or drinking, I will use it until it's *killing* me…until I'm in danger of dying. Literally. And I think that some percentage of all humans have this same issue, are "wired" like me…."(Maybe 5%? Many experts say it's only 1-3%. Seems higher to me, but my view may be skewed - for a long time I mostly only knew people in AA and NA.)

We are the small few who have a truly "addictive personality." That is, we are predisposed to addiction.

ADDICTION* IS *DEPENDENCY* COMBINED WITH *OBSESSION
AA says the same thing, more or less, when they say in "The Doctor's Opinion" that alcoholism is "an obsession combined with an allergy."

Allergy? I always kinda scratched my head at that turn of phrase. I *do* understand what AA was going for with this, I just thought the word "allergy" wasn't quite the best fit.

I believe that ***addiction* is *dependency* combined with *obsession.*** A person can become dependent on narcotics from prolonged use (for instance, after a surgery), but once the need for them is gone, people can be weaned off without psychological torment. That psychological torment is *obsession*. It's what will make an addict or alcoholic relapse after a time clean, after many times clean, when every cell in his body is telling him it's a bad idea, when the judge has told him "next time you come before me for drugs, you're going to prison for ten years." The addict doesn't want to mess up, but does anyway. That's obsession. Codependents have it too, with toxic people. They are dependent on the rush of fixing the other person, or being fixed by the other person, no matter how bad the person is for their serenity and wellbeing. And legislating that just doesn't make sense. Jailing an addict for using drugs is like jailing someone for *breathing*.

THE LAWS OF MAN VS. THE NATURAL LAW
People like me who "can't have just one" become slaves from substance abuse. If I started doing drugs again, I'd do 'em until they killed me. **But it is my moral right to do so if I want.**

Drug laws are morally bankrupt. The prohibitions drive up the price. So people commit crimes to get money for drugs because drugs are illegal, therefore expensive. Prohibition didn't work with alcohol, and it's not working with drugs. The War on Drugs is a farce. It's an ongoing initiation of force by the

nanny states of many countries. It doesn't protect us. It doesn't stop the flow of drugs. It doesn't prevent addiction and it doesn't make addicts sober.

The War on Drugs only fosters an atmosphere of fear in the citizenry and thus creates the clamor for more and more heavily armed, violent, jackbooted thugs *creating slaves via prison*. It also accustoms the citizenry to view the presence of these enforcers as normal, to accept "soldiers" who then stand at the ready to work the twisted desires of power-drunk leaders who do not "serve the people", but rather live to force their will on the hapless to maintain their jobs.

All incarcerated non-violent prisoners of the War on Drugs, anyone in for simple possession or dealing, at any level, should be released today.

Governments generally have a codependence problem. They hate anything they cannot control. Yet governments try hard to control things, despite the futility.

As they say in many 12-step fellowships, "Insanity is trying the same things over and over and expecting different results."

> NOTE: Here's another comment on our prison-industrial complex, regarding *judges sentencing people to go to 12-step meetings*. This has been under fire from some people, saying it mixes church and state. I agree with this.
>
> AA claims not to be a Christian organization, and it is open to people of all faiths, including people of *no* faith, but only because of the substitution "trick" of allowing use of the phrase (and concept) of "a higher power of your own understanding" rather than requiring use of the concept (and word) "God." But AA is, in my opinion, and the opinions of many, a Christian organization. AA's founders were Christian, and its concepts are adopted from Christianity.
>
> I don't think you can honestly *sentence* anyone to recover, because *recovery only works when someone wants it*. But I'll make a modest proposal here: If judges are going to sentence junkies and drunks to 12-step meetings, judges should offer people the option to buy and read this book. And your "12th Step" for my program can be buying (or downloading) two copies of this book for friends. Pass it on, brothers and sisters.

A LITTLE OF MY OWN AA HISTORY

As I said earlier, I am not a member of AA or any other 12-step fellowships any more, so I am not breaking my anonymity. I do not represent any 12-step fellowships. I intend no harm to any 12-step fellowships. They all do good work, and I'm glad they all exist.

> NOTE: In 12-step fellowships, there is a tradition of anonymity. People are supposed to refrain from "outing" themselves as members "at the level of press, radio and film." There are a few reasons for this. One is to avoid any sort of "star system." Everyone is ostensibly equal in a 12-step fellowship. A huge ego is poison to an alcoholic or addict, and can drive them back into the bottle or back to the needle.
>
> The main reason for the "we all wear one stripe in this brigade" attitude is so people don't embarrass the fellowship by publicly rallying around a flagpole, saying, "This thing is great! It sobered me up! Everyone should do this!" People who have a need to crow like that often end up getting loaded again, often in very public and embarrassing ways. So they're not really doing the fellowship any favors by anointing and appointing themselves as the standard bearer of recovery. Thus evolved the tradition of anonymity.
>
> Anonymity for 12-step fellowships makes a lot of sense. And it's the reason I think that all those recovery reality TV shows are a horrible idea, both for the people in early recovery trying to stay sober, and for the idea of recovery in general. I think those shows actually encourage the participants *not* to recover, because *conflict is the essence of drama*. The worse you behave, the better TV it is to many viewers. What better way for a has-been actor or musician to revive some semblance of a career than by relapsing and raging enough to do two seasons, rather then just the one he'll do if he stays clean and doesn't punch anyone?

AA does promote personal anonymity. However, AA is *not* a secret society, so I am not exposing confidences. I say that I have "evolved beyond AA", but that is not to say AA isn't worth checking out if you're drinking or drugging. 12-step meetings worked for me, but I really got tired of *those darned meetings*. I'm pretty gregarious, but really don't like shaking hands with strangers, and don't like having slogans parroted at me when I need more than a sound bite or a bumper sticker.

EIGHT LIVES SPENT

My dear friend of 25 years Michael Bérubé played drums in my first band, Baby Opaque. From behind the drum seat, and everywhere else, Michael got to see me at some of my alcoholic worst, while he was busy being sane, grounded and productive. Bérubé recently told me:

> I love the fact that you're writing this book. I remember when you joked 25 years ago (!) of some day writing "self-hurt books" and that was funny – but poignant, too, since you were so good at *hurting* yourself back then. So yeah, you've come a long way, and that will be the main hook of the book. As you know.

Bérubé's right. When I was a teen and in my twenties, I always thought I'd be dead by 30. I practically *planned* it. I grew up really believing "I hope I die before I get old." I wanted to be dead and famous by 30. Tragic. Romantic.

Pathetic.

I got sober two weeks before my 30th birthday. I had to. I was dying.

I was sober and *not* dying any more by my 30th birthday. I wasn't famous, but that was OK. I had a new chance at life, and fame didn't matter.

Since I should have been dead, and am not, every second after my 30th birthday is icing. Gravy. It all feels like a blessing. If I died tomorrow, I'll die happier than many people who die at 80.

I have literally cheated death a lot (four overdoses, one car wreck, picked fights with big guys while drunk, shared needles and slept with many people in San Francisco in the 80s and 90s, and I don't have AIDS).

I have to remember all this when I get all caught up in B.S. like being worried about career and possessions and money and stuff….I have to remember that I'm a dead man walking and *every* moment is a gift.

Now my motto is "I hope I *get old* before I die."

SPARED

Seven years ago I got my last tattoo. I don't ever need to get any more. The ones I have are enough. My last tattoo says "SPARED." It's on the inside of my wrist. I see it more than others do. It's not for them, it's for me. It's to remind myself to be grateful if I'm cranky or feeling sorry for myself.

Figure 8.1
My reminder that I'm spared

TOXIC TOLERANCE

In Chapter Five, "Your Rights End At My Nose" we explained why people get addicted to intoxication from substances, or are attracted to toxic people. (When very basic needs are met, and things are *the same* enough, we want them *different*. Over and over.)

But have you ever wondered how booze and dope *physically* work their corkscrews into your body? The physiology for the ever-increasing need is this: The liver perceives alcohol, speed, coke or heroin or whatever as a poison. The liver tries to practice self-defense. It produces ever-larger amounts of the enzyme that metabolizes whatever you're poisoning yourself with. Therefore, over time, you need a lot more of your "poison" to feel the same.

Changes also occur in the chemistry of your brain. Different drugs (including alcohol) operate differently, but they all change the way the reward system and pleasure center functions between your ears. With time, the brain produces less and less of the naturally occurring "happy chemicals" on its own, and eventually you *cannot be happy without the drugs*.

This takes a while to undo once you stop taking the drug, which is why sober addicts often don't feel "normal" for a long time. (Especially with stimulants. Opiate addicts tend to feel "right" after two months. Speed and coke addicts can take a year or more.)

But the potential for the "short circuit" can never be undone, once the new pathways are burned into your body and brain. You cannot "turn a pickle back into a cucumber." You can't "put the toothpaste back in the tube." Even if you kick drugs or booze for a *decade*, within a week or two of relapsing, you'll be back up to the amount that originally took you years of use to need to get high. And you'll need a lot of time again after stopping to feel right.

I believe that codependence works the same way - that relying on other people for control of your reward center actually *changes your brain chemistry*. And returning from that war requires constant vigilance, because it's totally "three paces forward, ten paces back" if you go back to your old behavior. If you return to your toxic ways, toxic friends, toxic lovers and toxic playgrounds, you'll have a hard time getting back to where you want to be, back to where you feel *comfortable in your own skin*.

KICKING

All drugs (including alcohol) work by borrowing energy and pleasure from tomorrow and using it today. When we eventually stop, we have to pay back tomorrow for yesterday by feeling bad today.

Codependence works the same way. When you kick drugs, booze or bad people, you're going to feel worse for a while, not better.

> While kicking, drugs or people, *reminding yourself* that you feel bad *because you're kicking* will make you feel better. You'll still feel bad, but you won't feel *bad about feeling bad*.

SIDESTEPPING RECIDIVISM

Quitting drugs hurts, but it's relatively easy. I've done it dozens of times. Lol….But I didn't *stay* off until I went to AA and NA and practiced the 12 Steps. AA worked for me for a long time, like ten years. Then I grew and evolved away from AA, and still didn't go back to being a junkie and a drunk.

I've figured out a way to stay sober 'n' sane *without* the Twelve Steps. I'll explain that now.

Chapter 9 – Twelve Steps? How About *Two* Steps!

ON THE 12 STEPS

LEGAL:
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These are the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous:

1. ***We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.***

2. ***Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.***

3. ***Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.***

4. ***Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.***

5. ***Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.***

6. ***Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.***

7. ***Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.***

8. ***Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.***

9. ***Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.***

10. ***Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.***

11. ***Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.***

12. ***Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.***

12-STEP PROS AND CONS

The 12 Steps are solid. The 12 Steps are a great way to reprogram oneself from toxic behavior that is destroying you.

Critics of AA have accused AA of being "brainwashing." AA members counter with, "Well, my brain *needed* washing."

I can actually somewhat buy this line of reasoning, even though anything that seems "culty" scares the hell out of me. I fully submitted to the "cult" of several 12-step fellowships for a decade. It saved my life, got me out of a progressive cycle that was literally killing me. When you are in such a state that *makes sense to drink despite it leading to pain and tragedy*; when it *makes sense to literally pick a dirty needle out of a gutter and stick it into your arm*, something's seriously wrong. When you use that same needle to *inject heroin that was smuggled into California from Mexico via someone's rectum,* heroin cut with shoe polish and cat hair, *and that makes sense to you*, you need help.

I needed help. And I wasn't able to do it on my own.

The program of AA is solid. *The program* is defined by members as "the first 164 pages of the 'Big Book'." ("The Big Book" is AA jargon for the Bible-sized handbook that is in reality titled *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The fellowship is actually named after the book.)

"The Program" (how's that for a culty-sounding euphemism?) is a system for overcoming the "spiritual disease" of alcoholism. The program has also been applied to overcoming self-destructive behavior beyond alcoholism, for everything from codependence to sex addiction to gambling to overeating. It has worked well for all of these and I have no doubt of the transformational power of these 12 Steps. Both personally, from feeling it work in my life, and from seeing it work in many other people's lives.

A LITTLE ON AA'S HISTORY

AA's two founders and a few early AA members synthesized the program from, and were influenced by, many different sources: the Bible, correspondences with influential Swiss psychologist Carl Jung**,** help from Episcopal priest Sam Shoemaker, the book *Varieties Of Religious Experience* by Harvard psychologist William James, funding and advice from industrialist John D. Rockefeller, advice from Dr. William Duncan Silkworth, a book of Salvation Army personal stories of redemption called *Twice Born Men* by Minnie Carpenter, a daily devotional pamphlet called "The Upper Room", a secular group called The Washingtonian Temperance Society, a Christian organization called The Oxford Group, and some other things.

Early AA members more or less *made it up as they went along*, using trial and error, trying a pinch of this, a dash of that, until something worked, and then codifying it into *The Program*.

> To anyone who feels I'm disrespecting AA by starting my own "program" influenced in some part by AA, remember: I'm doing what they did. I'm forging my own thing using new ways of looking at old systems, based on experience. Though I'm not making it up as I go along. I've thought about this daily for fifteen years, since my first AA meeting. And I certainly have no desire to replace or eradicate AA. I respect any recovery that works for anyone. I just want to add additional observations for the people who feel "constitutionally incapable" of letting AA help them, or feel AA can help, but may be unable to take them "all the way."

AA actually *worked*, whereas little before had actually succeeded in sobering up drunks *and keeping them sober*. Since AA worked, early members felt that divine intervention had guided them. AA's co-founder, Bill Wilson (a.k.a. Bill W.), felt like his pen was moved by the hand of God as he worked on the AA book. (Early AA also found a drunk unemployed newspaper editor and sobered him up specifically so he could *edit* the book.)

Much of the AA program was adopted from the work of a now-defunct religious organization, The Oxford Group. Bill Wilson had been a member. It got him sober. Then he started crowing too much about *just sobering up drunks*. This diverted from the Oxford Group's primary purpose: spreading "first-century Christianity." That is, preaching *one man to another*, in the manner of Jesus and the Apostles. The Oxford Group showed Bill Wilson the door. Bill took his resentment elsewhere, got a coffee pot and started his own thing, Alcoholics Anonymous.

> The Oxford Group faded after their founder was reputed to have wanted to hang out with Hitler. Some of the Oxford Group's core teachings were later re-branded as the ominous-sounding "Moral Re-Armament", which later spun off the 1960s squeaky clean musical propaganda review, "Up With People."

WHAT IS THE AA *PROGRAM*?

The AA program basically involves a very few, very solid things. Everything else is mostly window dressing, customs, slogans, and hangin' out with your friends. And a lot of members are able to keep sober without *understanding* the mechanisms, as long as they "work the program" and go to meetings for the rest of their lives.

The working mechanism of AA is very similar to the program of the Oxford Group. It's just that AA applied it strictly to alcoholics. AA's steps are largely derivative of these Oxford Group concepts, the four *Spiritual Practices*:

1. *The sharing of our sins and temptations with another Christian life given to God.*
2. *Surrender our life past, present and future, into God's keeping and direction.*
3. *Restitution to all whom we have wronged directly or indirectly.*
4. *Listening to, accepting, relying on God's Guidance and carrying it out in everything we do or say, great or small.*

These are also sometimes expressed in short form (in a slightly different order) as the Oxford's Four Spiritual Principals of: "surrender, sharing, restitution and guidance."

> There is a commonly repeated thought that The Oxford Group had *six* steps, from which AA's 12 Steps were created. **There were no such six steps of the Oxford Group**. (Source: *Pass it On: The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World*, page 197.)
>
> The founder of the Oxford group did *love* making lists however. He wrote several different sets of numbered principals. One had 28 points. One had five. *Three* lists had four points each (the third was "The Four Absolutes": *Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness, Absolute Honesty, Absolute Love*). But the Oxford Group's four *Spiritual Practices* are the foundation of the 12 Steps at their most basic form.

The Oxford Group's four *Spiritual Practices* are all covered in AA's 12 Steps. In fact, Bill Wilson said that he divided the smaller number of larger concepts into a larger number of smaller "steps" to make them palatable to alcoholics,

particularly agnostic alcoholics. This seems like a bit of trickery to me, but hey, whatever works, right?

Another bit of "trickery" that AA does is the "higher power" stuff. They tell people like me, people who had a bad Christian potty training and don't like the word "God", to "substitute your own concept of a 'higher power'." Surfers might use *the ocean* as their higher power. Pilots might use *the sky*. Hippies might use *nature*. I knew a woman who used a top-ten rock band as her higher power (she relapsed).

AA members even tell agnostics to "use *the AA group* as your higher power." (Now *that* sounds pretty culty to me!)

Basically the solid part of this is: you weren't able to cure your problems on your own, so you need something bigger.

I don't believe in Christ, or any recognized concept of God. I'm a mystic, I'm sure there's something out there, but I don't spend a lot of time trying to measure the immeasurable with earthly instruments. I know a lot about science, I love knowledge, I understand and practice empirical process often.

But I know that science cannot now, and probably never will, be able to explain all the mysteries of life. Especially those involving consciousness and *especially* those involving "the spirit."

People don't need to know how a microprocessor works in order to use a computer these days. (Mainly thanks to the work of thousands of genius engineer geeks with advanced brains who hid all the math for us behind an easy-to-use graphical interface.) And you don't need to understand all the mysteries of the universe to *function* in the universe.

> Maybe *God* is simply the ultimate genius engineer science guy who made our world "user friendly." *The Great Geek in the Sky*. That's one of my ideas of what my "higher power of my own understanding is." And maybe "life" is simply the graphical user interface of the unfathomable mysteries.
>
> When I first got sober, my idea of a higher power was a 700-foot tall woman who loves me and watches out for me. I wrote and sang a song about her, called "My god is Woman." You can hear it here: www.kittyfeet.com/temp/Slish-My-god-is-a-woman.MP3

WHY ***12*** STEPS?

The number 12 sounds pretty catchy. I'd often thought that Wilson arbitrarily picked "12" as the number of steps, when they really boil down to *four* ideas (which I boil down to *two* ideas) because of the 12 Apostles of Jesus. I later found out this *was* his reasoning. I also think that he didn't pick *ten* as the number, because comparisons to the Ten Commandments would probably lead critics to say Wilson had a god complex. Which in fact he did. He was an ex-stockbroker who was, by his own admission, an ego-driven person who needed to be the center of attention. But he channeled this "defect of character" into an ability to *get things done*, and inspired the hearts of men. Then later in life, he worked on *removing* some of his defects when they started hurting him more than helping him.

> People who don't crave attention do not usually have the impetus to create a *movement*, even if their ideas are sound.

SHORTENING THE 12 STEPS

Here are the Oxford Group's four *Spiritual Practices*, with the corresponding steps in AA:

> *The sharing of our sins and temptations with another Christian life given to God.*
> =AA Steps 1, 4, 5, 8 (an 8th Step usually involves reading your list to your sponsor), and 12
>
> *Surrender our life past, present and future, into God's keeping and direction.*
> =AA Steps 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11
>
> *Restitution to all whom we have wronged directly or indirectly.*
> =AA Steps 5, 8, 9, 10 (and step 12, in the broad sense of "carrying the message" as being amends to society in general, rather to anyone in specific)
>
> *Listening for God's guidance, and carrying it out.*
> =AA Steps 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12

That covers all four of the Oxford Group's four *Spiritual Practices,* breaking them up piecemeal, the better to be swallowed by defiant drunks.

The 12 Steps are solid for getting off booze, drugs and codependence. And if you like meetings, for Pete's sake, go to meetings! I'd never try to talk anyone out of

something lifesaving, or something they enjoy. I just stopped enjoying meetings long ago, and insist that sobriety and recovery can exist without meetings.

DO IT YOURSELF

I felt I had to go to meetings to get sober and get out of my denial to keep sober, but after a decade, I decided I didn't want to go anymore. I stopped. People in AA often warn that you'll end up loaded, broke, unloved and dead if you do this, and with some people that's true. For me it's not. I got sick of *being addicted to meetings*, kicked that, and kept working the Steps and principles of AA in my life. It's solid.

I feel that meetings, or any type of therapy, are to get me back *into* life, not *replace* and *become* my life. I feel that treatment is the bus to get you there, not the destination. But once there, part of the treatment I needed was to keep changing my ways *on a daily basis*. There are no New Year's resolutions.

DRIVE-THROUGH RECOVERY

Early AA, in the 1930s, worked really *fast*. They didn't take years to studiously go through the program. There weren't any 12-step guides published by huge for-profit corporations in Minnesota. There wasn't even a Big Book. There weren't even officially any 12 Steps yet, though the ideas were all there, thanks to the Oxford Group's influence. They didn't even have formal *meetings* at this point. Yet they successfully got people sober, and the people tended to stay sober.

Early AA members often got newcomers started on *all* the steps *on day one*. AA's other co-founder, Dr. Bob, started making his amends on the *day he had his last beer*. He wasn't even completely sober yet!

After they'd been sober a few weeks, Dr. Bob and Bill Wilson realized that to *stay* sober, they had to "work on other drunks." (An integral part of the AA program is "passing it on" to others, helping other people stay sober. It's what the 12th step is all about. I've also heard this step sardonically called "Step 12: *Recruit! recruit! recruit*!)

Bob and Bill started going down to Skid Row to ask drunks if they wanted help. If the drunks said "yes", Dr. Bob would check them into the charity ward of the hospital where he worked, give them the "belladonna cure." "The Cure" helped with withdrawal symptoms, but also produced hallucinations which some folks consider the source of the "blinding white light" religious experiences that many early AA members experienced, and that are rare in AA today.

Once the drunk was sobered up enough to speak, Bob and Bill would ask him, "Are you ready to ask God for help?" If he said "yes", they'd get on their knees with him and pray. They'd tell him to ask for God's help staying sober (steps 1, 2, and 3). Then they'd give him paper and pen and have him do a "written moral inventory" (steps 4 and 5) right there in the hospital bed, and pray again, this time with the drunk asking God for help removing his spiritual defects (steps 6 and 7).

As soon as he could check out of the hospital, they'd ask him who he owed money or apologies to, and tell him to go pay them back and apologize (steps 8 and 9). Or if he was broke, at least apologize. They'd get the guy a shower, a shave, a haircut and if he didn't have one, a suit. They'd take him down to Skid Row to have him *testify* to drunks about his conversion, in order to help *him* stay sober, and also to get more "converts" (step 12).

Going forth, they'd start each day with a prayer and short meditation (step 11). Then they'd keep repeating *all* of this every day, in smaller bites, to continually fine-tune their lives (step 10). It worked.

WHY DO DRUNKS TELL THEIR STORIES?

In 12-step meetings, the speaker for the evening gets up and "shares." He tells his story, for 20 to 50 minutes, of "what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now." This "share" is in standard three-act movie structure, with happy beginnings in the first act, a decline culminating in a "hitting bottom" tear-jerker scene in the second, and heart-warming redemption in the third act. (This formula is used in almost every Hollywood movie and TV show, but is probably best illustrated by any "VH1 Behind the Music", which incidentally, often includes the subject of the story hitting bottom from drugs or booze, then climbing back up to rock the world sober.)

But a lot of people, even people with a lot of time sober, get it wrong. They spend 2/3 of their time on the "drunkalogue" (or "drugalogue") part, listing every fleabag hotel they ever vomited in. They often seem more interested in telling a good story and getting a good laugh (and a good cry) than in saving lives.

They've got it all backwards. Sometimes shares like this even *drive newcomers out of the room*. I've heard more than a few people say, "Those meetings make me want to get *loaded*!" This usually happens when the speaker, and other people raising their hand to speak at the meeting, are talking too much about the using (or drinking), and not enough about "life on life's terms", i.e., what to do *after* the drugs and drink are out of your system.

Life on life's terms is the *real* test anyway. *Living* sober is a much bigger challenge than *getting* sober.

In a good 12-step share of, say, 40 minutes, you only need to spend about five minutes on the drunkalogue/drugalogue. It's called "qualifying." This means "telling why you're qualified to speak at a meeting", showing that you drank or used drugs to the point of no return…to the point where you would die if you didn't stop, but you kept doing it anyway. The bulk of the rest of the share should be how the meetings, written homework, working with others and the subsequent spiritual awakening brought you back into the fold of society, and mainly, *how you're living life sober today.*

> NOTE: Just as there are different types of bars in which to get drunk, in any 12-step fellowship there are different kinds of meetings. Different meetings have different aggregate amounts of recovery. If you find yourself at an AA meeting where a lot of people are complaining, an NA meeting where a lot of people are loaded, or an Al-Anon meeting where a lot of people have broken arms and black eyes, you're in a low-recovery meeting. They serve a purpose, but it's more *triage* than hardcore recovery. I'd recommend you leave that meeting and go find one where over half the people in the room have multiple years sober, clean, or "detached with love" from intoxicated (or simply toxic) loved ones. You'll have a better chance of getting some *real recovery* at those meetings.

The purpose of "qualifying" isn't to impress or entertain people. The purpose is to connect with your listeners as a peer. Any alcoholic or addict has spent a lot of his life with people looking *down at him* as shameful or pleading *up to him* in frustration to "please quit hurting yourself!"

But in meetings, it's a peer, *looking straight across the table at you*, saying, "I did what you did, and now I don't. And I'll tell you how, if you'd like to hear it." Peer-to-peer therapy is more effective than someone in a position of power looking down with pity and anger at the alcoholic, or someone on the floor pleading up, "Please promise to change! *If you loved me*, you'd get sober!"

A sober alcoholic can often help an alcoholic not drink more effectively than a person with a Ph.D in addiction science can help. Because the Ph.D hasn't *been* there.

A good 12-step share is not a sermon. It's really a form of conversation. The "qualifying" part is only to tell the still-drinking or barely-sober drunk, "Yes, I'm

made of the same stuff as you, brother." And that takes less than five minutes. It really takes about 60 seconds. If I tell someone "I spent the rent money on dope, I quit the coolest band in the world rather than get sober, I overdosed more than once and woke up with my girlfriend slapping me under a cold shower as the paramedics broke down my door", they'll know I have reason to talk about recovery. If I show an addict my permanent track marks, let them touch the calluses in the veins on my arm that still remain long after getting clean, they will *know* I'm of the same cloth as them. I'm not a cop, a judge, a teacher or parent pointing a superior finger down at them, condemning them. I'm not a spouse or band mate pleading up to them. And I'm not saying, "If you really cared about *me*, you'd get sober."

A good share is *Identifying*. It's a mystical experience. It's part of a "spiritual awakening of the educational variety", both for the person sharing, and the listener.

A good share simply says, "I was like you", while looking eye to eye across the table with understanding. A good share says, "There are no tricks, nothing here but you and me and these cups of coffee. Well, that and some tough brotherly love."

WHAT HAPPENED TO 12-STEP MEETINGS?
Meetings can start out solid, but can become tainted by egos and agendas with time. We don't go to these meetings because we're healthy, and not everyone there is a beacon of mental health, even sober.

Meetings are a microcosm of democracy. And while democracy is a great form of government, it eventually degrades to socialism, because in a democracy, people who don't want to work will eventually vote in leaders who will "do the thinking for them" and allow them to not work.

A big problem with meetings of all 12-step fellowships is that over the decades they've become tainted by psychotherapy, and worse yet, pop-culture and new-age platitudes. The "program" practiced in a lot of meetings isn't even really AA any more. They're much more about people's *feelings*.

We've become a nation of people too much in touch with our feelings, and maybe a bit too sensitive to others. Which is probably better than not being in touch at all, but being *too much in touch* all the time leads to whining, sissification, and the glorification of the "victim mentality."

I'm fairly tough inside and out, but I'm also a sensitive guy. I like cats more than dogs. I can cry. A sunset touches my soul, and a sunrise makes me feel hopeful for the future.

But I know that ongoing sensitivity to the point of having a *constant victim mentality* will keep you from recovering as you need to, because you get attention for being such a good "victim." (There will be much more on this in Chapter Twelve, "Stop Being a Victim.)

The point of "sharing" at a meeting isn't to "compare scars." And the point certainly isn't *to dump your problems*. Sure, this makes you feel a little better, but so does vomiting when you're sick. And the people you vomit on feel worse. As I said, the point of "sharing" at AA meetings is simply to *Identify*, and then *Testify*.

Cross-pollination works for bees, but I don't know that it works for meetings. I believe that the Recovery Industry has hopelessly mixed Group Psychotherapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and 1970s-style Social Therapy with AA to the point that many AA members don't even know that they're practicing group therapy more than AA in their meetings. This happens because these are all practiced, to varying degrees, along with AA, in most Recovery Industry in-patient facilities. When people get out, they think that's "recovery" and do that at AA meetings, without knowing what they're doing.

> Some might say at this point, "Wait a minute, Michael! You're criticizing modern AA for absorbing other influences, when in fact, you yourself are absorbing many influences, *including* AA, in your LifeAmp program!"
>
> My response? "Yeah, but I'm not claiming it's *AA*."

BACK TO BASICS. *WAY* BACK.
Really smart AA members might counter my comment of "AA is hopelessly mixed with pop-culture psychobabble" by saying "You're absolutely right. So the thing to do is to go *back to basics*. Read the first 164 pages of the Big Book, and then go find a drunk to 'work on'."

But I'm kind of a lone wolf, and prefer doing my service to the world in other ways. I'm more about trying to be of service to people from all walks of life, not just drunks. And damn, I got tired of people whining about their *problems*. And as you now know, that ain't AA anyway.

I like the 12 Steps, but really didn't dig the robot class idea of making it your life. I worked the 12 Steps formally, with the writing assignments, once. After that, I simply integrated all the steps into my life.

Many people in 12-step fellowships formally work the steps all the way through, often taking *years*. (And usually balking many months on starting their fourth step. Which is silly. Show me a drunk who *doesn't* want to make a list of people he's mad at!)

Then they start over and *do it all again*. When they formally finish Step Twelve, they start over at Step One. And repeat. *For the rest of their lives*.

A common question in any 12-step meeting is "What step are you on?"

My answer would invariably be "all of them; I work them all, all the time." People would say to me (often in a superior tone), "Well, *keep coming back*, kid." They'd "quote scripture" at me (quote the Big Book word for word, often including the page number) and say I was suffering from "terminal uniqueness." (AA speak for "You think you're special, and it's going to kill you." A common attitude in meetings with people like me who think they can do it differently is basically, "Sit down, shut up, and just be another shiny ant on the pile, *if you want to live*.")

> I would never gloat at someone suffering from alcoholism, drug addiction or codependence, but I will confide something in you, in a neutral "teaching hospital" sort of way: *Doing it my way worked for me*. And some of those "book thumpers" who thought I needed "AA or the highway" or "NA or the highway" are now dead, or in prison for drugs, or the things they did to *get* drugs, or the things they did *while on* drugs or drink. Reminds me of a rare-but-great bit of AA folklore: "Be nice to the newcomer. He could end up being your sponsor."

CONTROVERSY ON THE IDEA OF THE "DISEASE MODEL"
Some people believe that the idea of alcoholism, drug addiction and codependence being "diseases" is false. Especially with codependence….That it's not a disease, but rather just loving caregiving taken to a far degree. That all caregivers (parents, nurses, people caring for a sick relative) have *some* characteristics that could be defined as codependent.

I can understand this to an extent. And it can be frustrating with codependence to grok the difference. It's easy for an alcoholic to know if he's sober. If he

doesn't drink, he's sober. If he drinks, he's not. Codependence is more often shades of gray than black & white.

And it can be exhausting to keep sane when dealing with people with extraordinary physical or psychological needs who have "done nothing wrong." My quote marks are not to imply that people with illnesses like Down's Syndrome or cancer, things that are completely out of one's control, have done anything wrong, they haven't. I'm using the quote marks to show how alcoholics, drug addicts and codependents blame their preventable behavior "on my disease."

The "disease model" definition of things like codependence and alcoholism has limitations, and I have some issues with it, even though I sometimes use *it in a general way*.

In addiction to calling alcoholism "an obsession combined with an allergy", many members of AA also say that alcoholism is a disease, and I agree *to an extent*.

AA has no official position on whether alcoholism is a disease, a moral sin, or something else. They consider this an "outside issue." But in most AA meetings, ***almost everyone*** *speaks of "my disease" when referring to their alcoholism*. This may be that thing I mentioned of non-AA recovery tainting AA, or it might be members reading between the lines of what the AA book may have been implying, but didn't dare say, because "more could be revealed" by science later. But AA *as it is practiced* in most meetings *becomes what AA is to the newcomer*. He takes it as "gospel", spreads it to other meetings, to other fellowships, and into everyday vernacular.

The Recovery Industry has picked up the "alcoholism is a disease" line and run with it, applied it to food, gambling, sex, chocolate, shopping, etc…. (I think some of this makes sense, but some might just be to sell books.) The Recovery Industry influences publishing, which feeds into Hollywood, and pretty soon, "alcoholism is a disease" is parroted as *fact* in movies, on every TV show, then in everyday language, even among people not in recovery.

But alcoholism is not a disease the way *cancer* is a disease. Alcoholism has solutions, cancer often doesn't. Both my daughter and my mother got the best cancer care there was, and *died anyway*. Most alcoholics, if they stop drinking, have a great chance of getting better. Cancer patients don't always have that chance. The outcome is often up to "chaos and statistics." (More on this later, in Chapter Ten, "Hardcore Recovery Without Meetings.")

Is taking care of a parent with Alzheimer's or cancer codependent? Probably not. Is taking care of a child with Down's Syndrome, by definition, codependent? Probably not. Can it be taken to extremes until it *becomes* codependence? Yes. Balance and healthy boundaries are everything.

In some ancient cultures, babies with physical health issues were left on the edge of town for the wolves. I'd like to think society has progressed and become more compassionate than that. (Though some of why leaving babies for the wolves is no longer practiced is advances in medicine, commerce and bounty to where caring for a sick relative is no longer a death knell for the family. Though it certainly can be a *financial* death knell, as well as a full-time job, on top of whatever your full-time job is.)

Is arranging your life around taking care of an active alcoholic or a person full of rage codependent? Yes. Yes it is. Absolutely.

EXCUSES, EXCUSES, EXCUSES….
AA addresses "loved ones of alcoholics" in the Big Book, but also more or less encourages the wives (AA was all men when the book was written) to *stand by their man.* Of *course* they do! *They didn't want to get thrown out in the cold for doing what they do*. In the AA Big Book chapters "To Wives" and "The Family Afterward", AA basically promotes and enables codependence, without ever using the term "codependence."

However, the AA founders did redeem themselves somewhat. The wives of the early AA members got tired of making coffee for their recovering husbands. They got bored sitting in the kitchen complaining to each other while their husbands recovered and laughed in the living room. So the founders told their wives to take the 12-Steps of AA and start Al-Anon. But I do feel the men encouraged the wives to set up Al-Anon in a way that would still allow the men to "get away with" continuing unhealthy behavior…relapses, being unemployed, gambling, philandering, rage, etc. "Smoking cigars" is even mentioned.

In their literature, the founders of AA, in my opinion, ask a little too much latitude for recovering alcoholics to be able to "get away with" what they have done and even what they continue to do sober.

> If I seem to have a lot more sympathy for the physically ill or differently-abled than for the mentally ill (the addicted, the alcoholic, the codependent), maybe it's because I *was* mentally ill at one time.

My main problem with the "disease model" of alcoholism, drug addiction and codependence is that people tend to use it as an excuse for horrible behavior, past, present and ongoing. People in AA often explain bad behavior with "My alcoholic thinking made me do it." Or "my disease made me do it."

Pugwash. *You* made you do it.

I think that codependents who continue to live in an emotionally (or physically) harmful situation, without taking the accessible steps to *change* their situation, are as *responsible for their own problems* as the alcoholics (drinking or sober) who refuse to address their shortcomings.

Whereas people thrust into the chaos of a statistically possible situation of actual physical disabilities, real *diseases* and conditions; cancer, birth defects, Alzheimer's, etc., in themselves or their loved ones, are not culpable. They're just dealing with life.

Alcoholism and codependence are more treatable. But you have to *want* the treatment.

RECOVERY WITHOUT MEETINGS
These days I basically take it "back to basics" with my recovery. *Way* back. My basics go back further than even early AA. My recovery is a little more like the Oxford Group. (Without their heavy "you'll go to hell if you have sex" morality, and without a desire to sit down for tea with the Nazis.)

My recovery goes even further back, to the basis of all Natural Law. Because I believe that AA's 12 Steps and the Oxford Group's Spiritual Practices are really all included in The Only Two Rules in Life.

To recap, they are:
THE ONLY TWO RULES IN LIFE:

- **Do not initiate, or accept, force.**
- **Keep your word.**

The Two Rules are not easily broken down specifically in a clear-cut this way, i.e. this rule = that step, the way AA steps and Oxford groups tenants can be related, because it's cross dimensional. It's kind of like translating a phrase from English to French, French to German, German to Spanish, Spanish to Portuguese and back to English. If you do that, you certainly may be rolling on the floor, laughing at the result. But you won't be *recovering*.

But I'll give the comparison a shot. I just *love* quantum math as applied to language as applied to the soul. (*That* was an example of being passive-aggressive. Remember that idea? OK. I'll try not to do it again.)

Most of the "do not initiate force" rule is included in the things that people do drunk and high. People commit more crimes drunk and high, both because they have less impulse control, and because they need money to continue their addiction. And people who are drunk and high tend to hurt people, physically and emotionally, more often than people who are not. Active addicts and alcoholics only care about themselves. They are incapable of meaningful relationships.

They also don't *keep their word.* When you don't keep your word, or when you hurt people, you need to make amends.

You need to keep your word to your fellow man, and that's difficult when loaded, whether you're loaded on booze, drugs, or codependence.

Basically, the goal of living by The Only Two Rules in Life is *to have integrity*. That's the method of my recovery, in a nutshell.

But just saying it is easier than *doing* it. *Doing* it requires continually analyzing, and when need be, adjusting, how you treat yourself, and how you treat the world.

INTEGRITY AND THE TRAINING OF THE MIND AND SOUL

Integrity is the quality of dealing with people honorably. This means dealing with everyone with the same regard and heart, in all situations. This does *not* mean that you do the same things with everyone; you do what you need to, and that varies from person to person and situation to situation. It does not even mean you give everyone the same *quantity* of your time. But it means you give everyone the same *quality* of your time and spirit, whether you're answering a quick e-mail as a friend, spending two years full time on a project with someone, or telling an SV to get lost and leave you alone. It means you deal with everyone equitably, without consideration of what you can "get from them", or if you even *like* them.

If you have integrity, you will ideally eventually always know what to do in any situation. And your actions will be consistent, whether you're dealing with the smallest or the greatest of creatures.

In martial arts like Karate, the goal is to train the body *as well as the mind*. The mind is trained to live a right life, to live with integrity. Part of this is knowing

when to apply the physical aspect of Karate, how to apply it, and when *not* to apply it. The physical part of the training reinforces this, and trains the muscles to do what the heart and mind have been trained to do. A Karate master, or any ethical person engaging in any self-defense, physical or emotional, when confronted with a challenge from an enemy, basically has three choices: walk away, stop the attacker, or *if and only if nothing else will stop them*, destroy the attacker. And the muscles do this when they should, because the mind already knows when it's right.

In our complicated modern world, it can take a lot of self-training to effectively practice The Only Two Rules in Life *in all that you do*. You train by looking at things differently, applying Practical Emotional Self-Defense, and seeing what works and what doesn't. With time and experience, your mind's "muscles" will learn better and better what to do in any situation. This is a primary goal of LifeAmp. PESD makes up one half of LifeAmp. (The other half is working smarter.)

ACTION:

- ***Change your ways.* Stop doing things that are bad for you.**
- **Live your life with integrity, and continue to examine your actions.**

We will learn more about how to do all this next, in "Hardcore Recovery Without Meetings."

Chapter 10 - Hardcore Recovery Without Meetings

THE PREAMBLE TO MY PROGRAM

I "cured my alcoholism" with I.V. narcotics use. (I seriously d*on't recommend this*.) And I only got clean because dope didn't *work* anymore. By 1994, I couldn't afford 100 dollars a day, and even on the rare day when I could scam up a hundred clams, that gram of Mexican tar heroin, when injected, really didn't "fix" me anymore. Not 1/10 as much as 1/10 as much did when I started out.

LEARNING TO "LIVE LIFE ON LIFE'S TERMS"

When I got clean I was very out of practice at everything. I couldn't even keep a part-time minimum-wage dishwashing job that had previously usually been filled by either an unskilled teenager or an elderly alcoholic. And it was more than just employment that I had trouble with. I had to relearn (or in some cases, *learn for the first time*) how to get a bank account, how to balance a checkbook, shop, pay bills, clean up my credit, talk to humans without yelling or threatening or crying, and how to have a relationship. Any relationship.

I had to figure out how to play well with others, and generally how to put one foot in front of the other to even do things that most people can do by first grade. Things I never learned in kindergarten because I was too busy eating the construction paste trying to figure out how to alter my mind.

I even had to figure out how to *clean my apartment and make my bed*.

When I got off drugs, I wasn't suddenly "struck wonderful." All I really knew how to do well was tell lies, play bass and have sex. It can be hard to get a job with that limited resume.

After I'd figured out how to make my bed, I wanted to learn some new life skills. I didn't spend much time trying to start a rock band again. I didn't want to be just another old sober dude playing in bars to other people in recovery. *That* market was already saturated.

So I learned to type, and honed my skills as a writer. Within five years I was making a living as a writer, and I'm still making a living as a writer.

A lot of people think that if they just get off the drugs and drink, they'll be fine. It doesn't work that way. Most drunks and junkies are sorely lacking in a lot of social skills, and have no idea how to function in society. If someone's skimmed and scammed their whole adult life, they have no idea how to write a resume, show up on time, behave in a job interview, and take constructive criticism without feeling threatened and wanting to scream.

They say that when you get clean you are emotionally whatever age you started getting high at. This is a rough estimate, and there are variables, but there is some truth in it. The same is probably true for getting away from codependence. You can't grow emotionally, or even grow very much intellectually, when stuck in toxic relationships.

I joked well into my thirties that I was "still trying to figure what I want to be when I grow up." But there was some truth to that then.

There are *some* short-term bonuses to emotional immaturity, especially if you're an artist. In a way, artists are people who spend their lives playing like children, but hopefully with the minds, independence and skills of adults.

But acting like a child will eventually drive people away, which kills opportunities. And it's pretty hubristic, as Steve Albini says, to imagine that society should pay you to sit around and create cool stuff. (If your art is something *people want to buy*, well that's entirely different.)

An "A for effort" doesn't cut it in the real world. It won't pay for lunch.

A corollary of The Only Two Rules in Life is that "there is no such thing as a free lunch." You have to *earn your keep on planet Earth*. And a good place to start doing that is by getting better at life skills. You cannot contribute to your place in the world while still having an addictive mentality (if your problem was drugs and alcohol) or a codependent propensity (if your problem was people). The solution to both is the same, once you've got the drugs, booze or people out of your life. Getting clean (or non-codependent) isn't the challenge. *Staying* clean and independent is the challenge. And to do that *you have to change your habits, internal outlook, and spiritual wiring*. And one place I'll agree 100% with the 12 steppers is that you have to do that one day at a time. *There are no New Year's resolutions.*

EXPECTATIONS ARE APPOINTMENTS WITH RESENTMENTS
Don't set yourself up to fail. Don't put any large amount of stock on any one particular outcome, because there are too many variables in the universe that might conspire against you. Too much chance.

I used to think that "the world owes me a living." This is unfair, and unfair in my advantage. It's also untrue. Later I thought "life is unfair, poor me." This is unfair, to my disadvantage, and also untrue.

Now I feel that life simply *is*. And it's mostly *what I make of it*. But sometimes life intervenes in our plans and shows us that things don't always work out the way we expect, regardless of what we do. And I don't think it's "God's will", "fate" or "karma", it just *is*. And having expectations that the unexpected will not happen is setting yourself up for resentment and disappointment.

When my daughter Amelia died of leukemia, a lot of people I hadn't talked to in ten or twenty years contacted me via e-mail or phone. And everyone else who was currently in my life contacted me. They all had deep condolences. It didn't really make me feel any better, but it seemed to make *them* feel better, and most of it didn't make me feel *worse*, so I put up with it.

What made me feel horrible were the few idiots who said some variation of "Amelia dying was part of God's infinite plan." ("She's with God now", "She was too good for this earth so Jesus took her home," etc.) People saying that stuff really believed it. And they were trying to make me feel better, so I just said, "Thank you…um, I gotta go," and didn't tell them what was really on my mind.

What was really on my mind was "*F*#% YOU!* HOW *DARE* YOU F*#%NG TELL ME IT WAS *GOD'S WILL*??!!!"

I told my friend Lonnie about this. Lonnie is a scientist, as well as a brilliant painter and photographer. We used to date, and we're still friends. (I'm still friends with most of the women I've slept with, except the three or four SVs I'd cross the street to avoid. But Lonnie rocks.) She was the only guest at my and Debra Jean's courthouse wedding. (DJ and I like people, but usually don't like crowds, so a *single guest* at our wedding suited us well.) Lonnie was our one guest, and also served as both the legal witness *and* the photographer at the wedding.

I told Lonnie about the idiots telling me it's "God's will" and she laughed. Lonnie is an atheist. Not an agnostic, but a 100% I-am-absolutely-sure-there-is-no-God atheist. Science is her god.

She's an atheist, but she's somehow also one of the most spiritual people I know. And being kind to people is her spirituality. She's not a pushover, she's just a *very good person*.

Lonnie smiled and said, "I don't think it's God's will that Amelia died. I think it's just chaos and statistics."

This really hit home with me. It actually gave me a lot of relief. Made me feel better. I'd been feeling sorry for myself, and was really taking a lot of this personally, like Amelia's death was something that was done *to* me. And that's really selfish thinking. If I thought I had it bad, how about *Amelia*?

I took Lonnie's "It's just chaos and statistics" and tempered it with my belief in God. What if there *is* a God, and what if God *doesn't* care about me on a minute-by-minute basis? And what if that's *OK*? I started to think of a new point on my ever-fluid and evolving axis of what God is. This is about the point I began to picture God as a genius nerd scientist who makes and winds the clock of the universe, but *we* determine our own fates, except the parts that are ruled by chaos and statistics. I'm not sure there is a "God's will", but I am sure there is being a good person. I think there are "God-given rights", but I think what we do with them on a day-to-day basis is up to our own integrity and ingenuity. What happens to us is up to *us*, except the parts covered by chaos and statistics.

Continuing to be a drug addict or a codependent is entirely up to us, regardless of what happened in our past. Whereas dying of cancer is chaos and statistics.

> Soon after Amelia died, I came up with a thought while feeling sorry for myself: Either life isn't fair or it's just ironic. I do know that many good people I love are dead, and every single smarmy bastard I've ever wished dead is still alive.

MORE ON EXPECTATIONS AND RESENTMENTS

Love may not last. People close to you may die. You could get hit by a meteor, a bus, a stray bullet, an illness or a pink slip. The point is to live life knowing these things *could* happen, so you're not flummoxed if they do. But you can't live in fear of what *might* happen. Because a life lived in fear is no life at all.

So plans might not work out. You may not end up where you want to be in life. But as long as you're walking a right path, *you cannot fail*, because you're still sucking air, and you're still a human having a spiritual experience.

One of my small "takeaways", my life lesson, with realizing that *expectations are appointments with resentments* was to not put too much stock in the outcome of anything I do.

When I say "I don't put too much stock in what I do", I *don't* mean that I don't care. What I mean is that I don't bet all my happiness on any one outcome. This is expressed well by one facet of my work ethic: I work on projects that I *want to* work on. When they're done, I put them out in the universe. I promote them as best I can. Some of them catch on with the masses, some don't, but they're all successful *because I enjoyed doing them*. And if I "bet the farm" on any one thing hitting a home run, I'd be miserable if that one thing didn't pan out. I just do the footwork and don't worry too much about the results.

> (Yeah, I know there were five clichés in those last two sentences. Sometimes being a good writer can even include knowing when *not* to "reinvent the wheel.")

Hollywood is full of miserable screenwriters and actors who believed they'd "make it", didn't, and think that life isn't fair because all their dreams, expressed as that *one* dream, didn't come true the way they've seen it work for others on TV. Again: Expectations are appointments with resentments.

> We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't. And we're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off.
> --Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club

IS LIFE FAIR?
It probably is. I strongly believe that people make their own path, unless some chaos and statistics get in your way. And though chaos and statistics may get in your way, how you take it is up to you. Amelia took it with dignity, and aplomb to spare. She was calmer dying of cancer than most people are when they get a traffic ticket. And that gal *loved* life.

She fought the cancer, but she accepted her fate and didn't blame. Any time I feel like complaining, I remember that.

If chaos and statistics don't wipe you completely off the face of the earth, pull yourself up *no matter what*. There is no free lunch, we're on this planet to work, live, laugh and love, but the first thing is work. That's the true deal of recovery. That's what you recover for. To work. Work is one of the best parts of life, if you do work you love.

Don't be a pussy and think the world owes you a living. Don't loaf, don't lie, don't steal, don't initiate force, and don't be a serenity vampire. Because if you do any of those things, you're fair game for any more evolved and honest person to know they have the right to take you out of the gene pool, literally or figuratively, at any time. And you'll deserve it when they do. Like I said, life probably *is* fair.

AMENDS
Amends are part of making life more fair if you've done something to make it less fair to someone else. Amends exist to make your slate clean and right with yourself, as well as with the world. Part of keeping The Only Two Rules in Life is making amends when you need to. But a lot of people, when they first get sober (or start recovery from codependence) think they owe amends to almost *everyone* they've ever met. This is because they've been living so long without respecting themselves or others, that when they start to have a conscience, they suddenly *feel* the impact of their selfish ways, on themselves and others. The pendulum swings far the other way. If they're living a right life (via The Only Two Rules), eventually, they find a happy medium.

Conversely, some people get into recovery and think they owe *no one* an amends. These are usually angry people with a victim mentality. With time clean and with exposure to sane people living by the Only Two Rules (if they don't first drive everyone away from them), they may begin to "see the light" and stop being such a victim and recognize instances when they may have wronged people.

When I first got sober in AA, when I got to the amends part, I thought I owed something to everyone I'd ever met, from people I'd ripped off to the kid I'd made fun of *once* in 8th grade. I had over 300 people on my list. When I look back on that list now, I realize it should have been a lot shorter. It should have been people I'd really harmed, with the operative word being *harmed*.

Whenever someone is mad at me now, I ask myself "Did I *harm* them?" If I honestly didn't *harm* them, I don't feel a need for an amend. Some people are upset all the time, and play victim. Some people think the world owes them a living, and want a settlement, an apology or just some drama, all the time. Those people are SVs. If one says you owe them something, and after soul searching you are sure you do not, leave and block them.

> NOTE: Many legal proceedings, particularly civil suits, are really just an attempt to bully a sincere and voluntary apology from the person. You cannot, by *definition*, bully anything *sincere* and *voluntary* from *anyone*. You cannot legislate an apology. With very annoying people who are not truly physically dangerous, yet demand unwarranted apologies, the best course of action is removing yourself from their equation. Same goes for people who expect the world to proactively protect them, rather than doing their own self-nannying, like ethical people do. Some of these SVs file outrageous lawsuits demanding special treatment, so as not to have to work as much as everyone else. Avoid these people, whether those demands occur in a court of law, or in a casual conversation. Even if they're not filing demands on *you*, run, don't walk, in the other direction if they tend to look to *get paid* just for being alive.
>
> From
> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stella_Award :
>
> "The Stella Awards are awards given to people who file outrageous and frivolous lawsuits. Named after Stella Liebeck who, in 1992, spilled a cup of McDonalds' coffee onto her lap, causing third-degree burns. She sued McDonalds and was awarded $2.9 million in damages, subsequently reduced by the judge to $640,000, though a later secret settlement was reached between Liebeck and McDonalds."

HOW TO MAKE AMENDS

A true apology is not what a lot of people think it is. It *isn't* going to the person in grief and crying, "Dude, I am so sorry, I was awful!", and then saying that again

every time you see them. It's also *not* when you go to them and say, "I'm sorry I did this. But you also did something bad *to me*, and that's why I was the way I was." It's also *not* when you make a sincere apology, but keep doing the same thing to other people (or especially to the same person you were apologizing to). And it's not an amends if you blame it on the drugs or your crappy childhood. You have to live with what you do.

A *true amends* is something you think about, come to grips with, and then tell the person how you were wrong. You don't blame the other person. And you don't apologize over and over. You say *once*, sincerely, that you won't do it again, and then ***you don't do it again. With them or anyone else***.

AN APOLOGY ONLY WORKS THE FIRST TIME

An amends isn't just an apology. It's *changing your ways going forward*. And not just with the person you harmed. The verb "amend" means "to make changes and improvements." An amends is changing your ways. The apology is the *easy* part. *Without the changing of ways going forward, an apology is nothing more than empty words.*

The point is to make it right with the person you harmed, make it right with yourself, and make it right with the *world*. Not just at this moment, but for the *rest of your life*.

This is why you should make amends *promptly*, not *immediately*. Making amends requires some serious thought, and maybe a little while of not thinking about it after that. Just let it sit. (But without waiting so long that you're stalling, which can harm the other person.)

You should not make amends in a way that harms anyone. Think things through. *Some things are better left alone.*

MAKE SURE YOUR AMENDS REALLY *ARE* AMENDS

Don't make amends that *harm* people. That isn't an amends, that's continuing abuse. And learn to recognize those passive-aggressive (or even aggressive-aggressive) fake amends when others try to make them, whether they're in recovery or not.

One of my friends who read a draft of this book said:

> "I completely agree with what you say about AA. Every word. It's absolutely necessary for a lot of people, but the meetings can turn into another form of dependency. And you know what else? The "making amends" thing can be seriously abused. When my brother

> reached that step, he started sending me these weird passive-aggressive messages like "I'm sorry and I want to apologize for that time when you pissed me off so much because you were such an asshole."

ASK *THEM* WHAT YOU CAN DO

A thing I see missing in most amends is the idea of *asking the person* you harmed *what you can do* to make it right. I find it pretty specious to go to someone you've truly harmed and *tell* them what you're going to do to make it right. Because what you have planned might be the last thing they want or need.

After you sincerely apologize, ask them if there's anything *you can do* to make it right. If it's reasonable, do it. If it's not reasonable (if they ask you to commit a crime, for instance), don't do it.

By simply *asking* them how to make it up to them, rather than *telling* them how you plan to do it, you're on your way to being a genuine gutter saint transmitting pure love from your heart into the world.

> *We are as gods and might as well get good at it.*
> --Stewart Brand

(Brand said this in 1969 about harnessing the interpersonal power of computers and other tools, but I like to apply it to LifeAmp.)

EXPECTATIONS WITH *AMENDS* ARE APPOINTMENTS WITH RESENTMENTS

Don't expect the person to say "Cool! You totally screwed me over, but you apologized, so it's all good." If they get mad, take it graciously. And don't counter with "Oh yeah? Well you…(insert counter-blame here)!!!" Because doing that completely undoes the good of an amends. "Keep *your* side of the street clean." Don't worry about *their* side of the street.

In early recovery I phoned someone I'd previously turned on to drugs, who had become an addict. I know she has free will, as do we all, but I'd been selfish. I turned her on so I could use with her, as well as use her. I called to apologize to her.

Her mother answered the phone and screamed at me "SHE'S IN JAIL FOR DRUGS! YOU RUINED HER LIFE! YOU RUINED MY LIFE! IF YOU EVER CALL BACK, I'M CALLING THE POLICE!"

I didn't call back.

Years later, I ran into the woman I owed the amends to, and made the amends in person. She was three weeks clean (in her fourth try at getting clean), and said, "Thank you for apologizing. It wasn't your fault, I made my choice, but thank you for having the dignity to apologize anyway."

She's still clean today. And so am I, and I don't use people for drugs and sex any more, which is part of my *continuing amends* to the world.

ACCEPTING AMENDS

If someone makes amends to you, even if they don't call it that, be gracious and accept. Period. But if you feel, in your heart (not in your *emotions*) that there is something they should do to make it up to you (and they don't ask), tell them so. But do so with love and compassion.

DON'T FORGET THE AMENDS *TO YOURSELF*

Part of living an addictive or codependent life is doing a lot of damage to your own life. Part of what you owe the universe going forward is to *treat yourself better*. Not in a selfish way, but in a kind and loving way. Consider taking care of your own health (mental and physical) to be part of your amends. See a dentist and a doctor. Get regular checkups. Eat better. Exercise. Improve your life. Go back to college. Learn a trade. Work. Read a lot more. Teach yourself a lot. Get outside. Make quality friends. Do *all the things you put off* while you were out chasing the unsustainable high of drugs, booze or bad people.

GIVING BACK

Giving back helps you stay sober, sane and balanced. But it doesn't have to be a lifetime of service in the system you recovered in. Get out there in the *world* to give back. I do not feel anyone should be guilted into volunteering for charity, but if any form of giving, especially of your time and skills, helps you feel good, do it.

> I have a friend who is well off and is into being helpful with money, but doesn't do it through an organized charity.
>
> She has a younger friend who is a brilliant student who has trouble paying for college, even while working two jobs. My friend occasionally sends the student a check for school, even though the student is not related to her.
>
> Work like this is an excellent way to make amends to the universe too, if you've harmed someone monetarily but for one reason or another you cannot pay them back directly. (Like if they've died, or

> if you cannot find them even with diligent searching, or if you never even knew their name.)
>
> Giving money to someone you care for is not a handout, and I have no ethical problem with it. My ethical problem is when it comes out of my taxes, without my permission. That's stealing.

As for being of service, personally I'm especially fond of mentoring and teaching. Helping someone who's trying to do whatever you're good at will help keep you focused on who you are, and will also help you learn where you're going.

ON BECOMING HUMAN

To live a life free of addiction or toxic relationships, you need "something to do and someone to love." "Something to do and someone to love" won't *get* you sober and sane, but once you *are* sober and sane, "something to do and someone to love" will help *keep* you sober and sane.

Best advice I've heard is to start with a plant. If the plant doesn't die, get a cat. If the cat thrives, consider human romantic relationships.

The more you get back into life and love, the less twisted and unusual you will feel, if you are living by The Only Two Rules in Life.

Again, don't take "advice" on this. Some 12-step robot drones, parroting things they've heard without even knowing exactly they means, will tell you "Oh, you're just *fixing* being really into your wife/your cats/computers/books, etc…You're making those things your higher power, and you're going to *relapse*."

But fug it. Those things aren't my higher power, and they keep me happy, healthy, productive and alert. I recover to get back *into* life, not to make recovery my life.

Life is short, and then it ends. Do not waste time.

DEALING WITH DEATH

Dealing with death is the ultimate "life on life's terms." It can be the strongest test you'll face in recovery.

If someone you know has a close family member or friend die, I don't recommend you tell them "she's safe with Jesus now", especially if the person is not a Christian. Don't tell them "It's God's will." (How the hell can *you* know,

anyway?) It won't give them comfort. And if you're trying to proselytize, you'll be picking a damn poor time to do it.

There isn't much you can say to someone who has lost a loved one, other than "I'm so sorry." And as with amends, *asking them what you can do* is better than thinking you know what they need. Ask "Is there any way I can help you?" and be willing to do what they ask, within reason. (While I still wouldn't rob a bank for them, I think I'd probably go further in helping someone in this situation than I would with someone I'd harmed. Because they're probably feeling harmed by God. Harmed by the universe. That feels worse than being harmed by a person.)

Maybe they just want you to sit with them. Maybe cooking dinner would make them feel better. You don't know until you ask.

Out of the scores of people who offered condolences when Amelia died, only two *asked what they could do to help*. One guy offered money, which *really* helped. He gave me 400 bucks, which helped me *get to my daughter's funeral*, which I couldn't afford at the time.

If someone's kid dies, or their spouse dies young, don't say, "I know how you feel. My mother, grandpa (or *cat*) died recently." Because we're supposed to outlive our parents (and our pets), but not our children or young/middle aged spouses. You do *not* know how the person feels.

A friend of mine lost her father recently. This is all I could offer that was honest and from the heart:

> Sorry to hear about your father. Having lost both my mother and daughter, I know there are no words, and most people offer too many. All I can think of is, "I'm truly sorry for your loss." As cheesy as that sounds, please do know that my experiences put those words at face value, and I do mean what I say. And let me know if there's anything I can do for you.

The friend was recently unemployed and trying to get a job while simultaneously dealing with her father's death. She said, "I hate to ask, but would you write me a job recommendation?" Since I knew her to have great integrity and work ethic, I told her I would be honored, and I took time to write her a great letter of recommendation. It's the only concrete thing she needed, and was worth more to her in her situation than a dozen people saying "I'm sorry" and "It was God's will."

PRAYER

After Amelia's death and then Lonnie's "chaos and statistics" comment, for a while I stopped praying. I didn't think there was no god. I was still sure there was a god but I was *sure that he hated me*.

That is a much darker place than being an atheist. Atheists are comfortable in their sureness that there is no god. But if you're sure there is a god and you're sure he hates you, it feels like being pushed around by the ultimate bully…the biggest bully, and worse yet, a bully that *cannot* be blocked, because he's everywhere, including *inside you*.

I didn't sleep much for months, which only made the feeling worse. But with time, I got out of my darkness a bit. I slept a little more. Still nowhere near eight hours a night, but maybe four-and-a-half or five hours a night. That was a relief.

Then I started praying again. I hadn't really prayed for a long time, and praying helped. I also did a lot of thinking. That helped too. I analyzed my situation rationally, and stopped feeling as sorry for myself. That allowed me to stop hating God as much. I became more logical and realized that chaos and statistics really *do* have a part in the universe.

I began to form a further refinement of my mystical beliefs. I now have one that really works for me. I'm still using this image of the nature of God, and God's relationship with man. It's impossible to truly put the immeasurable into the finite 26 letters of the alphabet, but I'll try:

> God is the sentient, benevolent and infinite force that created the heavens and the earth*, and God created life. God is the force that set everything into motion. This force may have an effect on the minute-to-minute workings of our lives, but only in the sense that God built the evolving physical system, and also gave us *free will*. This free will allows us to put ourselves into whatever situation we're in, barring interference from the *occasional* intervention of chaos and statistics, which God also entered into the equation.
>
> The run of humans on this planet is finite, but we pretend it isn't, and we build and live accordingly. We *have* to. *Because a life lived in fear is no life at all*.
>
> But there was once a time when there were no humans, and there will again be a time when there are no humans.

In the meantime, God does not "answer" my prayers like Santa Claus or a genie who grants wishes. God doesn't intervene like Congress to "adjust" things on the fly, or bail me out if I mess up. God isn't Big Brother watching me in my home, and is not *my* big brother who will beat up my bullies. And God isn't vain or egotistical and will not be angered if I don't tell him he's doing a nifty job every day.

But for me, it's good to say little prayers to God…prayers of thanks and gratitude, not a shopping list of demands.

Praying is not "so God listens to me." Praying simply helps me be open to the mysteries of the universe.

*("..heavens and the *earth"* may seem *earthcentric*, so what of it? I honestly don't put a lot of day-to-day thought into the spiritual dealings of life, if any, on other planets.)

I told Debra Jean this, and she basically said I was concisely explaining something she'd believed all along. She said, "As a child, the first time I heard that 'God cares about the falling of every sparrow', I thought it was ridiculous. How could any one creature or person or thing be worth that much of God's attention? As an adult I still think it's hubristic to believe that God cares specifically about any one individual. But that's OK, because I do think God's intentions toward life are benign and supportive. And I think that's enough."

My wife is very spiritual even though she is not religious in any way. I'm the same. We say little prayers to God, to the universe. And we hug while saying the prayers. I usually start with "Thank you God for this wonderful woman", she usually says, "Thank you God for this marvelous man." The rest is mostly prayers of thanks, and prayers for *other* people to become healthier. We end each prayer with "…and God bless all the kitties in the world. A-MEW!" We say the A-MEW part together. It's sweet. Sometimes we cry a little, out of gratitude. We always hug and kiss. Sometimes we go have great sex after, or eat a wonderful meal.

Praying for others (especially people you hate), rather than praying *for yourself*, keeps your ego in check and makes you not hate the other people as much.

Remember: sometimes the world is difficult and ugly, but life can also be stunningly majestic. What happens over a long time line in own your life is *mostly up to you.*

CAT SOCIALIZING
Part of the stunning majesty of life is cats.

I used to be a volunteer kitty foster parent for the SPCA when I lived in San Francisco. I'd get a kitten or two or three and take them home and love them and socialize them for a month. Then bring them back, and get new ones. (It's easier to give them up if you don't name them. I called them all "kitty!"). Over a period of two years I had over 50 kittens in my home, a few at a time. Cat socializing, or having your own cat or dog, will build your self-esteem. And socializing makes them adoptable. If they are not socialized, they become mean, no one will take them and they get put to sleep.

Contact your local SPCA or other animal shelter if you want to do this.

THE HEALING POWER OF BEASTS

> "Cats are the best things to have around the house. They are self-cleaning sculptures that move themselves from place to place, and provide love and amusement. All for the price of a can of food."
> --Nunzio Capaldi

> "Cats are too perfect to be anything but proof that there is a God."
> --Leahcim Yellek

Having pets is also great practice for caring for humans. And pets are a wonderful solace when you've had a bad day, and a great addition to a good day. All mammals love warmth, touch and kindness, they thrive when loved, and return even more love than you give them.

Cats are also useful as an icon of Practical Emotional Self-Defense because they are natural experts at it. They're warm yet independent. They will love any decent person unconditionally. Cats give people the benefit of the doubt, but if irritated, they will fight in self-defense with sharp teeth and claws.

Cats are educational. They'll teach you how to barricade, hunt, love, and how to hide condemning evidence. And cats will teach you not to crap where you eat, figuratively and literally. They'll teach you to be prepared (they sharpen their claws constantly). They'll also teach you how to defend yourself against sudden physical ambushes, which will help you learn to recognize conditions that parallel *emotional* ambushes in humans. (Pretending everything's fine, being friendly for no reason, and being twitchy while trying to look unassuming.)

> If you think that me telling you to have pets to help keep sober sounds silly, I say it makes more sense than collecting marbles, which is a suggestion in the AA book *Living Sober*.

Cats are *never* slavishly dependent upon *anyone*. They come to you when *they* feel like it.

> "You don't own a cat, he is a free citizen. Take dogs; dogs are friendly and fun and loyal. But slaves. Not their fault, they've been bred for it. But slavery makes me queasy, even in animals."
> --Robert A. Heinlein, *Farnham's Freehold*

Cats also intuitively seem to know all about the Cooper Color Codes, and will teach you how to effortlessly switch between Condition White, Condition Yellow, etc.

> TIP: Hold your beast and tell her "I'm proud of you, you're brave and strong and wonderful", etc. They'll love the sound of your voice, and bond with you more. And beasts *are* brave and strong, and wonderful! Talking kindly to a beast is good exercise for being kind to humans, and letting them know when they've done well.
>
> Another tip: when looking into a cat's eyes up close, close and open your own eyes slowly, taking about a second for each action. This calms cats. And if they blink slowly in return, you're golden! (This doesn't work with dogs though. If you blink at them slowly, they'll just stare blankly.)
>
> Another fun thing is to get a birdfeeder and hang it outside your window so the cats can watch the birds. It's almost like having *pets for your pets*. A birdfeeder is great to keep them happy if you work a day job outside the house and are gone all day.

HOW CAN YOU BE *SAD*???
When I was volunteering at the San Francisco SPCA, and constantly had kittens in my home, whenever I would get melancholy or cranky, my girlfriend at the time would say, "How can you be sad? You have baby cats!"

She was right. Pet therapy is wonderful. All mammal pets, especially cats, know when you're feeling down, and will come to you to comfort you. Cats are the perfect "unicorn chaser" to a bad day.

When my daughter was suffering from the physical effects of chemo, and worried about the uncertainty of her future, her cat gave her great comfort. When Amelia passed, my cats gave me great comfort. Cats will always help you get through emotional rainy days.

Figure 10.1
Fuzzbucket McFluffernutter waits patiently for Mommy and Daddy

Figure 10.2
Fuzzy's brother Peanut McFluffernutter
hunts and attacks a catnip toy.
Seriously - how can you *possibly* be upset when you have baby cats?

Figure 10.3
All three of our fur children: Fuzzy hunts the mighty catnip fish while Charlie Squitten, Jr. and Peanut get ready to pounce.

Dogs are cool too. I like 'em, I just like cats better. I'm a cat man, dude. If you like dogs, get a dog. But you'll have to walk them more. You can't leave them in the apartment all day like you can with cats.

I used to let my cats be indoor/outdoor. Then Charlie Cat got attacked by a coyote. I yelled and scared the coyote off; it dropped Charlie from its mouth before it ran. The vet fixed Charlie up, but she's grounded for the rest of her life. So are the rest of our cats, and any cats we get in the future.

Pets will eventually die. You'll outlive them. My wife and I have outlived two of our cats together so far. Dealing with pets dying is a great dress rehearsal for dealing with bigger losses. My wife and I figure we'll have maybe three or four more sets of cats in our lives. Then *we'll* die. And that'll be OK. Hopefully we'll die of natural causes in each other's arms in a warm room full of books and other work we've created, surrounded by snuggly cats.

Cats will slowly reprogram you to change your ways and be a better person. They can't do it alone, it doesn't happen by osmosis, but they are certainly a wonderful tool.

Cats are not as trainable as dogs. The real purpose of having cats is to train *you* to be a better person.

MORE WAYS OF CHANGING YOUR WAYS

When I want to change a pattern that I don't like in my life, be it drugs, alcohol or codependence, I make a list of ways that thing has harmed me…everything…health, sanity, money spent, opportunities lost, people disappointed, harm to myself and others, everything. Then I read the list every day for a month, and add to it while I do. At the end of that month, it's pretty impossible for me to continue to be in denial about doing what I've been doing.

NEW PLAYMATES

If you "keep doing what you were doin', you'll keep gettin' what you got." If you keep hanging out with toxic people (drug abusers, drunks, or people you're codependent with), you'll find it harder to recover. You have to change who you hang out with, and where you do your hangin'.

This isn't as hard to do as you'd think. You might think you're "letting down your friends" by not going out with them, but you're not. They'll find other friends. And you'd be amazed at how quickly people will quit calling you when they find out you're not doing what they're doing any more. They'll think you're a drag. You'll harsh their buzz. Bum their trip. Poop their party. Wet their blanket. They'll quit inviting you quicker than you can decline the invitations. And if that isn't proof you don't need to be hanging out with them, what is?

THE USELESSNESS OF OPINIONS

Most people have a few friends who will say, "Go for it, man!" or "You go girl!" whether you're about to do something brilliant or something stupid. The problem is, friends often only hear *your* side of the story, and they'll almost always think you're right. Especially if they're people pleasers; they'll tell you what you want to hear.

Rather than asking your own personal "yes men" what to do, ask people who are successful in the task you're trying to accomplish. If you want to know how to keep a relationship together, don't ask a twenty-year-old guy who's had ten girlfriends and lost them all. Ask an older guy who's been married for 20 years. If you want to know how to get and keep a job, ask the lady who's had one for a long time. And if you want to know how to get and stay happy, ask someone who's "come a long way, baby." Ask someone like me.

I don't ask people specifically *what to do*, that's advice. Even coming from someone who's done it right in their own life, it may not be the best advice for you. They don't live in your head, and they don't know every detail of the situation, every conversation you've had with the people.

I ask them *what they have done in similar situations*. When trying to make an important decision, I recommend asking three people who are *where you want to be* what they have done (not what you *should* do). Then make an educated decision. Some people ask these experts, then "pray on it." If that works for you, groovy. But I find often that when people think they're listening to God's voice, they're inserting their own words, what they want to hear. Ask your heart. If God has ever spoken to man, the heart is where God writes his words, not the head.

> I also find that taking life-lesson suggestions from people who are still actively in their addiction, to substances or to people, doesn't yield useful advice. "*You can't have a heart-to-heart talk with a blackout*."

CUTTING OFF DAMAGED GOODS

If someone you truly haven't ever harmed uses any phrase like "I never want to see you again", then *goes out of their way to see you again*, they are probably insane. Or at least very damaged goods. You should take them at their first word and never see them again. You'll both be better off. Same goes for people who lie.

STOP LYING

Part of living life on life's terms is to be honest. Do not lie. Lying is a simultaneous violation of *both* of The Only Two Rules in Life. Lying is initiating force, and it's also not keeping your word. Any time both rules are broken at once, it usually somehow involves lying.

Addiction, either to substances or to people, leads to a lot of lying. Lying becomes a habit that doesn't automatically stop the moment you stop drinking or get the toxic person out of your life. You need to work at recognizing when you lie, lie to yourself to enable you to lie to others, or tell half-truths, and wean those horribly toxic habit out of your life.

PAY YOUR BILLS

Fiscal responsibility makes me hot! It's sexy, in myself and in others.

Part of your contract with the planet Earth is continuously paying what you owe. It is part of your continuing amends.

If you can't pay a bill on time, make arrangements. It's surprising how many people don't know that you can do this. Call the company, wait on hold, don't whine, and ask what you can do. Be confident, polite, don't yell. Don't ignore bills. I'm amazed how many people think they can do that. It doesn't work. Bills don't "just go away." They ferment as late fees get added.

LOOK PEOPLE IN THE EYE

Many people today, especially young men, cannot look someone in the eye while talking to them. This was different when I was younger. It's a sign of confidence to look someone in the eye. Don't "mad dog" people and intimidate them by staring incessantly and intently, but make eye contact when you're talking. People who are confident but not cocky show it by looking into the eyes of people they're talking to. (A firm handshake doesn't hurt either. But don't crush anyone's hands. Firm, but not initiating force.)

If you're out of practice looking people in the eye, or never learned to do it, practice it. It's a good quality to have. And you can often tell a lot about the person you're looking at by seeing what's in their eyes. Just as they can see the person you are in your eyes.

BE POLITE

An important part of being a useful citizen of the planet Earth is being polite. There is no reason not to say "please" and "thank you" until someone demonstrates otherwise. There is no reason not to say, "excuse me" if you bump into someone (literally or figuratively). It doesn't mean you're weak, it means you're good.

Of course, all bets are off if someone ignores politeness and is an ass to you. Then your choices are to go away, block them, or stop them by any means necessary, depending on the severity of their actions. You may falter at your first few attempts to apply *the correct amount and correct type of emotional defense* quickly and efficiently. Knowing the appropriate reaction intuitively, every time, comes with trial, observation and time.

IF YOU FALTER, DO NOT FEEL DEFEATED

If you don't do everything right the first time, learn from your mistakes. With substances, people, with *life*.

I *used* to think that the "if you have one drink, you've relapsed" idea in 12-step meetings has it's place. That it was a *good* thing that if you were ten years sober, had a couple glasses of wine at dinner, you'd have to "start at the end of the line" and publicly prostrate yourself by "raising you're hand as a newcomer" at

meetings for 30 days. (I've even seen a relapser stand up in a meeting crying and "make amends to the group for letting you all down"!)

I think part of the reason 12-steppers who relapse will often stay "out" and use until they die is because *they are told they will*. I had a friend who was three years clean, then took one of his girlfriend's valiums on a night when he couldn't sleep and had an important job interview the next day. He felt so guilty for "relapsing", that he went on a nine-month crack and heroin run that nearly killed him.

(In early AA, they didn't call one drink or one night of drinking a "relapse", they just called it a "slip." In the 1930s, you didn't have to "change your sobriety date" unless you went on a lost week of getting hammered, or a month-long bender.)

If you falter, do not feel defeated.

Don't use this line of thinking as an *excuse* to falter, but don't torture yourself as a "failure" if you do.

Four years ago, after I was done with meetings, I smoked some pot with a friend (on his yacht, in international waters, 20 nautical miles from shore). The world didn't end, I didn't drink, didn't do hard drugs later. Didn't even smoke pot again. I had a good time, but kept finding myself in different rooms of his yacht saying to myself "*What did I come in here for again*???"

I didn't like it. *I like my brain*. I like *work*, and drugs and alcohol get in the way of work.

After the yacht "trip", I came home, went to sleep, woke up a little foggy but not much worse for the wear, was fine the next day, and haven't used any intoxicants since. I see no need to. I feel that I've evolved beyond them. They worked for a few decades to deal with emotional pain, then, a few years after they no longer worked, I stopped.

WE ARE NOT PERFECT

I'm human. I know that life is a *work in progress*. If I weren't working on improving my life on a daily basis, I would be less happy, less comfortable in my skin. (So would the people around me!) "Life is a journey, not a destination." It may sound cheesy, but it is so true.

It took me a long time to realize I'm human. When I was a little kid, my ego was far bigger than it is now (if you can believe it!). One of my favorite things to do

when I was about seven was march around the house saying, "I'M PERFECT! I'M PERFECT! I'M PERFECT!" When I did this, my mother, God rest her soul, would gently grab my wrists, and examine me for crucifixion holes. Finding none, she'd smile and say, "Not today."

For much of my life, I vacillated between thinking I was either the crowning pinnacle of God's creation, or else a piece of dirt on the bottom of God's shoe. I now know the truth: **I am a small but important part of the universe.**

You can also know that *you* are a small but important part of the universe. To do so, you'll need to drop the crap that's holding you back, continually work on getting better, work at finding new compassion & strength, new life skills and work skills. And work on finding better ways to utilize *all* your gifts. *And do so without being stepped on*.

AA addresses the fact that we are not perfect with their phrases "progress not perfection" and "we are not saints." These are great thoughts to remember, as long as they don't become excuses. I have seen a great many people in recovery continue to act harmfully to others and themselves after getting sober, and brush it off with "Hey man, it's progress, not perfection!"

I don't hear this line used this way as spiritual. I hear it like Homer Simpson saying "D'oh!"

Using "progress not perfection" is OK to not beat yourself up for the bumps in the road that are part of the human condition, but don't let it become justification. This is similar to what I said in Chapter Five about not using the idea that "everyone's hands are probably a little dirty in one way or another" as an excuse for bad behavior, and like what I said in Chapter Nine about not using "my alcoholic thinking made me do it" as an excuse to continue screwing up.

CAN EVERYONE RECOVER?
Some people are beyond help. They are broken machines. They have no moral compass, are sociopathic, and only express remorse as a tactic in court or when attempting to keep someone around to abuse further. It has been suggested that psychotherapy not only cannot help these people, but that it trains them to elicit sympathy on command, which in turn makes them better criminals.

Recovery can only work for people who are good at their core. This means people who fundamentally resonate with the idea of The Only Two Rules in Life. Recovery can help these people even if drugs, booze and codependence have driven them to criminal acts.

People who do not have these rules etched on their soul are true criminals and should possibly be ground into cat food by life.

CAN YOU BASE YOUR RECOVERY ON NOTHING MORE THAN A BOOK? Yes, you can. This book is not your higher power; it is simply my experience, strength and hope. The other stuff you need is inside you. You're *made of it*. "You're soaking in it now." "Looking for God is like a fish looking for water."

The AA book claims it can keep a lone Eskimo sober, so I will say that my book can keep you guided. You'll need good people in your life too, but this book can help. A lot.

The alphabet is the most important creation of man. More important than antibiotics, air conditioning and computers (which are probably the second, third and forth most important). Writing is the basis of all planning, progress, science, much of civilization and most art. Writing is part of what separates us from the beasts. It's what allows our thoughts to be in places we are not. (Which is the reason I encourage you to get very good at communicating in writing.)

Recovery, of any type that works, is all about *one person being able to transmit experience to one other person*. I have recovery, I have been given the gift of the ability to transmit it by speaking to you, and I have honed the ability to whet my words into a sharp laser of tough love pointed right for your heart.

So yes, this book can transmit recovery. But you'll have to actually *do* some the things in the book, not just read the book. You'll need ongoing *action*.

ACTION:

- **Ask for *experience*, not opinions.**
- **Look for places in your life that need improving.**
- **Look for instances you have lied.**
- **Look for people with whom you need to make amends, but do not make them without thinking them through.**
- **Make amends where you need to.**
- **If you haven't yet, look into *the healing power of beasts*.**
- **Make a list of places and people you would benefit by avoiding.**
- **Avoid them.**
- **Take responsibility for your actions.**
- **Don't use "being human" as an excuse, but if you falter, don't give up.**
- ***Work*. And work at being able to work on something you love to do.**

(More on this in chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16. For now, write down a short list of things you'd love to do for work, and what steps you might take to get there.)

- **Repeat all.**

BEST DAY SOBER?
I've heard people in 12-step meetings say, "My worst day sober is better than my best day loaded."

I say, "Balderdash!" My best day loaded was *far* better than my worst day sober, and even better than some of my pretty damn *good* days sober. But I will say this: **My *average* day sober is *far* better than my average day loaded.**

The same is true with recovery from SVs: the longer I keep at it, the better life gets overall. There are days when I feel bad, feel I've gone too far with a particular boundary (which, as I said, usually only happens because I didn't enforce smaller ones earlier), but I learn from it and move on. You will too.

CONCLUSION
So, we've tuned up ourselves and gotten on a path of changing our ways, on a daily basis. But in the last three chapters, we've mainly worked on how we, in our recovery, present ourselves to ourselves, and to the world.

Now it's time to work more on how we deal with the world presenting itself to us. We'll fine-tune our Practical Emotional Self-Defense in Chapter Eleven, "You Have the Right to be Left Alone."

Chapter 11 – You Have The Right To Be Left Alone

> Do not proffer sympathy to the mentally ill; it is a bottomless pit. Tell them firmly, "I am not paid to listen to this drivel - you are a terminal fool!" Otherwise, they make you as crazy as they are.
> --William S. Burroughs

BULLIES AREN'T JUST PEOPLE WHO BEAT YOU UP
I am my property. I own me. I own my mind. I own my body. I own my time. If you invade my mind when I don't want you there, you're trespassing. Invade my time, you're stealing.

Bullies initiate force. Anyone who does something to someone else that the other person does not want done is initiating force, whether it's physical or psychological.

Serenity vampires are bullies, and bullies are serenity vampires, even if they're passive-aggressive rather than aggressive-aggressive. Even well-meaning mosquitoes who get in your way waste your time, which should never be tolerated.

> Recovery from codependence is more about recovery from the *anguish* you get than it is about blocking the people themselves, though the people are a big part of it. Getting bad people out of your life is the opening salvo of the battle, keeping them out, keeping new ones out, is "holding the hill." And dealing with the anguish is "liberating and rebuilding" your territory. But you cannot deal with the internal anguish until the *people* are out of your life.
>
> Then and only then will you have the calm to rewire your brain over time, and learn to recognize early warning signs of emotional bullying in *new* people you meet.
>
> People often show you their "best side" first. But if they are pushy in a way that makes you uncomfortable, or conversely, are needy in a way that squicks you out, run, man, run.

OUTGROWING THE BULLIES
"Someday, I won't have bullies…."

I've said this many times in my life. Then I'd get rid of one bully, and another bully would worm his way in. I've finally gotten to a point in my life where I know that all I can do is avoid them really well, and block them really fast, if they do get in at all.

It's taken a lot of work. I'm more able to do this than I've ever been, and more able than many people ever are. Part of it has been constant work on becoming more independent and less needy of validation from others. Because SVs prey on that need for validation.

I've made my own path, and you can too.

Becoming less needy comes from three things:

1. Recognizing toxic relationships and toxic people
2. Having more self-confidence
3. Making your mark in the world

Doing point one leads to point two. Point two leads to an ability to do point three. Doing point three in turn reinforces point two and makes it easier to do point one. Whereas codependence is a vicious cycle - sticky, viscous mess - recovery from codependence is a *cheerful* cycle.

When the world likes what you're doing with your life, or even when *you* like what you're doing with your life, you worry less about what your neighbor thinks of what you're doing. And you'll care less what the occasional idiot who sends you anti-fan mail thinks you're doing.

QUIT IT, CRITIC CRITTERS
(Say that three times, fast!)

Keep in mind that the more good you do in the world, the more you are excellent in the eyes of others, the more you'll get random hate mail from strangers. Because some people are just pricks, kicking against greatness. They're jealous of anyone who does things well. This is because they are incapable of doing great things, and see life from the viewpoint of a cut walking through a lemon world. Everything irritates them, so they lash out and verbally slash at anyone who is happy and productive. They are not comfortable in their own skin, so they want to skin you and roll you in their salt. Don't let them.

A few years before my good friend Liza Matlack passed away from leukemia, she told me, "Mean-spirited criticism doesn't *ever* come from someone who's doing valuable art themselves."

People with integrity do not deliver mean-spirited criticism. SVs *love* to deliver mean-spirited criticism. They have fear of the abilities of others, because they do not have confidence in their own abilities. The mentally and spiritually weak will always prefer destruction to creation. It's easier to destroy than to create, so destroy they do.

"WHEN I GET OUTTA HERE…."
When I was in grade school, I was bullied. I was physically small, and a sensitive kid. All artists are sensitive as kids. I was smarter than most of the other children, I could read earlier, wasn't good at sports, and was an easy target for larger, slower kids with less good going on in their lives.

> I was happy last week when my hometown newspaper did a front-page article about me. Because it basically says, "See, he turned out OK…maybe *better* than OK," to the many people who doubted or criticized my aspirations.

> I've been in much *bigger* publications before, but none that made me feel as *triumphant*. Sometimes the best long-term payback is simply a life well lived.
> www.stinkfight.com/2009/03/16/living-well-is-the-best-revenge/

When I was picked on, shoved around and called names in grade school, I said to myself, "As soon as I'm in high school, this will be different. I won't be bullied." When I reached high school, things did not change. I did get a little less scrawny, a little more muscular, was a varsity wrestler (105 pound class) but there was always someone bigger than me. And that didn't really matter; most of the bullying I've had in my life was *emotional*, not physical.

When I got to college, some of the bullying *did* stop, in that not much of the bullying that I experienced was at *school*. I went to a community college. Community colleges are not known for being particularly competitive academically, and people pretty much kept to themselves. But I still experienced bullying, some subtle, some not so subtle, from friends, relatives, strangers on the street, and more. I said to myself, "When I get outta here, I'm gonna be free from this crap." Then I left college and entered the working world.

I experienced bullies many places in the working world, not just bosses and coworkers, but even just people cutting me off in traffic on the way to work. You never know who's having a bad day and how they're going to take it out on whom. That's the nature of the world.

I drank a lot to deal with being a sensitive person. Even as a young adult, I felt more vulnerable than many people do. I was overly sensitive about small things, and sometimes completely *insensitive* to big things. People in AA call this "the alcoholic mind", but I just call it being *inappropriately sensitive*. I don't think that only alcoholics are like this, and I've met a few alcoholics who are not like this at all. (They're quite the opposite. *Nothing ever* bothers them, even things that should! Which is *also* inappropriate sensitivity.)

I think that even with people who've been beaten up a lot, most of their bullying is emotional. It's everywhere. People who *can* be bullied *are* bullied. "If you look like food, you'll get eaten." "Dogs can smell fear." And bullies are wild dogs.

> I heard someone say of those classmate-finder websites: "Why would I pay money to sign up for *that*? There's a REASON I haven't talked to those people in decades!" This is funny to me, because it's *true* to me.

WHY SOME PEOPLE THINK THEY NEED BULLIES

Drug addicts and alcoholics have a hard time "getting around to" getting sober, because their sick routines feel *familiar* to them. And codependence, as horrible as it is, can feel *comfortable* in its familiarity when you've had it so long you don't know anything else. The sickness becomes "normal", even if you're quietly screaming or dying inside about it.

Fear of having *nobody* keeps a lot of people with a bad *somebody*. Don't cut yourself short. You can have better relationships if you make room for them in your life. Toxic relationships scare away good people, and also take up so much of your mental and spiritual space that you have no time or energy for good people.

IDENTIFY PROBLEM, ASK AROUND, CONSIDER OPTIONS, SOLVE, REPEAT.

The main idea of LifeAmp is to improve life's signal-to-noise ratio, to give you more room in the data table of life. This gives you time to do with your life what you've always wanted to do, but never could do.

It also gives you the opportunity to discover *new things to do* that you wouldn't have even considered. While I always wanted to be a writer, I never considered being a filmmaker until I was many years into recovery. And before my first five years of recovery, I wouldn't have been *sane enough* to get to hang around the people who inspired me to learn to make documentaries.

EXPRESSING BOUNDARIES

Telling someone "You're bad" or "You should do this differently" will turn most people off, and rightly so. No one likes to be told they're *bad*, and most people don't like to be told what to do.

A better way to express boundaries is to say "When you do _____, I feel _____."

That's not you judging them, it's simply you stating a fact about the effect they have on you. It's you telling them how they make you feel.

Rational people will be at least somewhat open to this. If someone is not open to this at all, they probably aren't a rational person. If someone *belittles* you for it, they are a bully.

> TIP: There's a similar idea in teaching. When teaching anything to people, even ones who *want* to hear what you have to say (the only

people who really *are* teachable), it will turn people off to use phrases like, "You should do things this way…."

It's usually better to say "I have done things this way…."

BOUNDARIES, *GOOD*….
You have the right to be left alone when you want to be. This involves letting people know when and how you want to be left alone. You will have to enact healthy boundaries like the ones we learned in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. It will also involve *defending and enforcing* those boundaries when need be. This is easier if you enact small ones as soon as they're needed, before they build up into a need for big ones.

At first, you may find yourself overstating things, and setting boundaries where they really aren't needed, or making them more stern and harsh than they need be. Or setting them *just where they should be,* but being squitteny about the way you go about it. This all happens often, when people actually *realize* there are such things as boundaries, where before, they had none. But with time and practice, the pendulum swings to a happy middle, and you will intuitively know when and where to stand your ground to protect yourself emotionally, and when to simply walk away.

TAKE IT *ONE BOUNDARY AT A TIME*
Boundaries not served up properly cause them to overflow into heavier, demanding boundaries served up in outbursts. It's better to serve them up in smaller doses, as they are needed, rather than doing the magical thinking of saying to yourself, "It'll work itself out."

If serving up boundaries to bullies, even diminutive "baby bullies", doesn't work, disconnect from the person. People like this will make you unhappy, and that will interfere with attaining your best life goals.

Bullies can even keep you from ever *learning* what your best life goals *could* be.

ACTION:

- **Make a list of people who have bullied you, and what you could have done differently.**
- **Make a list of any times you've bullied someone (if you have), and what you should have done differently.**
- **Make a list of goals you would like to accomplish in your life.**
- **Make a list of ways that being bullied, or being a bully, has kept you from these goals.**
- ***Stop being a bully, and stop being bullied*.**

WHAT ARE IMPORTANT GOALS?

> "I see all this potential, and I see squandering. God damn it, an entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables; slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate, so we can buy shit we don't need.
>
> "We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war."
> --Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*

I can't tell you what your important goals should be. But I'll tell you this: After decades of hard work, I finally have some money. I'm not worried about my next meal, or the roof over my head. And I can finally even spend a little more than that. But life, love, art, beauty and *feeling comfortable in your skin most of the time* are far more important to me than money.

Family is often said to be the most important thing. This is true, but it's also a double-edged sword. Most people believe "family is the most important thing" to the point where it can keep them in toxic relationships until they die. Maybe longer.

I recently ran into a friend I hadn't seen in a long time. We chatted and caught up. When I asked her if she was still going to Al-Anon, she laughed and said, "No, I'm cured." I asked how. She said, "My mother died."

But a few years later, she started going back to meetings, because she was *still* dealing with issues of codependence that had started with her mother three decades earlier.

"Your family can push your buttons because your family *installed* your buttons." They partitioned your hard drive. Picked your icons. They had a heavy hand in your nature *and* your nurture (or lack thereof).

FAMILY IS WHATEVER YOU SAY IT IS

Once you're old enough to know what kind of person you want to be when you grow up, it's your job, nay, your *duty*, to reallocate your internal resources to where they'll be most useful *to you*. Because *if* your energies are squandered dealing with weenies, mosquitoes, SVs and other squickiness, you *cannot* be of full use to yourself, your fellow man, to the people who want useful interactions…to the *family you make for yourself*.

Don't let *anyone* suck your blood, even if the DNA in their blood shares many alleles in common with the DNA in your blood.

I don't spend a lot of time with people who are not good for me, and who get in the way, at least time-wise, of my chosen goals with work, love, life and family.

I think family *is* the most important thing, but I also think that we make our *own* families. A healthy primary "family" can be *any configuration or unit*. It could even be just you, your lover, your cats, and a *very* few very close friends.

MY IMPORTANT GOALS

To know my goals now, let's take a look at my goals from ten years ago. Or better yet, how about me ten years ago comparing my current goals then to my goals of ten years before *that*?

I wrote this in 1999, it was in my first published book, a novel called *Starving in the Company of Beautiful Women (*currently out of print, but a few stores are selling used copies on Amazon*)*:

> The word "insanity" is bandied about in song and talk like it's a goal…as if insanity were a positive attribute. "Let's go crazy." "It was cool, I was out of my mind!"
>
> If you have ever *really* been out of control of your faculties, you know it's a drag.
>
> It used to be that all my heroes were do-or-die rockers. Then the last one put a shotgun in his mouth and sprayed pretty blond brains all over his room. About a month later I started to find new heroes.
>
> You haven't heard of most of my heroes. Most of my heroes are just common folks who quietly have their life together, and are all about putting good into the world.
>
> Many of them have an edge, though. I adore these kick-ass, rock-n-roll subtle angels; healthy, shining boys and girls and women and men who straddle the edge of light and dark, and *pump it* hard, sweet and mean. I love people who can dress up in Mother Earth's pumps and play life rough, like the way puppies fight with love. People who prefer *this* side of the chasm spanning dominance and degradation.

I love to get really, really dirty…and really, really clean.

I feel that I am on this earth to have fun, love, laugh, help folks, feel, sing…and do *tasks*. Lately I have been looking at each day as a laundry list of small duties that reveal themselves to me in a linearly logarithmic manner. At the end of a day, if I have put most of the things in their right place - that song on that tape, that letter in that mailbox, that message on that machine, that kiss on those lips, that ear to listen to that friend…*and* get the dishes done, too - then I can sleep a happy man.

Every time I finish consuming some product, I throw the container on the recycling heap or down the garbage chute in the hall and do a little victory dance and think, "Yes! That much closer to death! That much closer to winning this game with grace!"

At the end of each day, I *X* it out on my calendar. Not nihilistically hashmarking away a life sentence - no. It is me celebratorially rejoicing in another day well done, and 24 hours closer to the completion of this grand scheme.

At the end of my days, if I have done most of the tasks put before me, I can die a joyous kitty.

I used to want to die a fiery, cool death before I turned 30. Later I wanted to die old and healthy of natural causes, in bed with two 23-year-old girls.

Now I think about slipping calmly of old age into that dusk in a room full of books and albums and paintings by me, surrounded by my spouse, children, grandchildren and lifelong friends.

I'll race ya….

SO, let's review: twenty years ago, I wanted to have sex and die young. Ten years ago, my goals were to be sane, happy, healthy, and have "something to do and someone to love", and have many friends and a few kids. But I was still far away from most of it.

Now my goals are still to be sane, happy, healthy, but I've actually *met* these goals, and I *continue* to meet them. I've found my "something to do" *and* my "someone to love." (Since my daughter died, I have decided that I do not want to

have any more kids. Too much sadness if they go. Now I can only see having "fur children" - cats. And I haven't painted in a while, but I'm still doing everything else I wanted to do.)

Going forward, my goal is simply to continue to live well. I have a desire to make a mark on the world. I'm partway there with the mark, and at age 44, I'm a little past the halfway point of the average life expectancy. So I have a lot to do. I cannot let SVs get in my way.

I succeeded at most of my goals of 20 years ago to be crazy and cool…until it almost killed me. (I almost made *that* goal, but failed. Sometimes it's OK to be a failure!) Then I *admitted to myself* that that phase was over, really *internalized* it, long after it really *was* over.

I later started to learn to survive, and finally moved on and learned to *thrive*.

Learning to recognize in your life when a phase is really *over*, and learning to intuitively figure out what to do *next*, will take you further than anything else in the world.

To do this, I had to truly internalize that I have *the right to be left alone* by people I don't want around me.

We'll talk about more ways to tell when a life phase is over in Chapter Twelve, "Stop Being a Victim."

Chapter 12 – Stop Being a Victim

Professional victims are in demand these days. We see them every afternoon on TV talk shows. These shows are soap operas with no actors.

Professional victims are people who have had something horrible happen to them, then make a *career* out of reenacting their grief. Over and over. They do it in real time, too: relive each tear, each torment, and then "see the light", all as a tiny three-act play. They live on "redemption in the third act." And the more horrific the first two acts are, and the more tortured they still feel, the more talk-show engagements they'll get. The more talk-show engagements they get, the more books they'll sell.

Professional victims get book deals even if they can't write. Probably even if they can't *read*. ("Don't worry honey, we have writers to *do* the actual *writing* for ya. You just sit down and tell 'em your story. We tape record it, then they write the book. You just pose for the photo on the back flap.")

Professional victims traipse up and down the talk-show circuit, dragging their triumphant redemption-in-the-third-act circus around the nation. And the studio audiences cry and mewl along with them, right on cue, then applaud like trained squirrels.

Even victims who don't have an agent and can't "go pro" *can and do* get mileage out of their story. There are many unpaid full-time victims who maintain their amateur status. (So they can compete in the grief olympics?) You probably know a few people like this.

Having a victim mentality is its own subtle way of initiating force. People who can't overcome their past expect people to give them *special attention*, which, in essence, is demanding something they didn't *earn*. It's a form of stealing. It's stealing time and energy. Many victims also want the world to give them *financial* breaks, which come at the expense of others. That's *literally* stealing.

Many criminal sociopaths and also garden-variety bums are, in a way, professional victims. They scam and get over using their sorry stories (real, embellished, or entirely fictitious) to *not have to work*.

IS IT NATURE OR NURTURE?

I often wonder if professional victims are born or made. There is a prevailing perception regarding criminals and other ne'r-do-wells to "blame it on the upbringing." I don't buy it. **You are what you make of yourself**, regardless of what you have to overcome to get there.

Sure, Charles Manson had a less-than-perfect childhood, but so did a lot of people. Including me. I think most people would agree that Manson is a "bad guy." Whereas plenty of people with crappy upbringings never went on a killing spree, and are honest in their dealings with others.

STEPPING AWAY FROM PROFESSIONAL VICTIMS

There are *real* victims who are currently being victimized (or have recently been victimized). They can recover. Then there are those who hold previous (and even ongoing) victimization close to their heart *as part of their self-image*. Sometimes they hold on to their victimhood because it's an image they're comfortable with, sometimes because it gets them pity (and maybe even money), and sometimes because it's an excuse not to work and grow.

And sometimes it's all three reasons.

Delete from your life those who hold close to their heart previous, or even ongoing, victimization.

And if you have any of the same in yourself, work to drop it. It's toxic.

GET OVER IT!
I believe that anyone can get out of ongoing victimization. I believe that everyone's station in life is determined by their own actions more than by circumstance. People are not forced to remain in a rut their whole lives. They *choose* to be. I believe that anyone can rise above anything, even abject tyranny or enslavement, and I have little patience for people who blame others for having a poor station in life.

"God helps those who help themselves."

> Fighting abject tyranny or enslavement may not "succeed" in the sense of instantly granting you freedom. Many people throughout history have fought tyranny and enslavement, even *died doing so*, rather than giving up in the face of insurmountable odds. Doing so *is* success. Lying down and "taking it", even if victory seems impossible, is defeat.
>
> The best thing to do in an untenable situation is to fight for victory anyway.
>
> This is also true in PESD.

I love my life. I've had some heavy tribulations, but I've made a great big vat of yummy lemonade from it all. A lot of the worst things that have happened to me have directly or indirectly synthesized in me some of the traits that I love the most. But I don't compulsively disclose my past problems (or any present problems) to everyone who will listen. If you met me and talked to me for a day, my past probably wouldn't even come up, unless, for some reason, you specifically asked me about part of it.

My childhood was not always great, but I turned it into something good. I got sad a lot, and angry, but always got myself back to *hopeful* fairly quickly. And I always *learned* from the bad. I let it make me wiser, more creative, and I forged my past lessons into being a happy person, a good husband, a good friend, and an ecstatically satisfied worker.

COMPULSIVE DISCLOSURE
Compulsive Disclosure is telling too much, too soon. Compulsive Disclosure is someone thrusting their issues into your nose without asking. For example, one

time I was at a dinner with friends at their house. I'd brought a new girlfriend to meet my old buddies. The new girlfriend was nervous, didn't know what to say, and finally blurted out, "This reminds me of the room I was molested in as a child."

Nice ice breaker!

People kind of looked at their food, and quickly changed the subject after an awkward pause. The host later asked me not to bring the girl back.

(She's made great strides emotionally and socially in the years since and doesn't compulsively disclose now. She's now happily married and we're still friends.)

Compulsive disclosure is a form of initiating force, not always intentional, but it can make a pleasant conversation very twitchy and squicky very quickly. It's certainly a type of "getting attention by being a victim."

Professional victims tend to compulsively disclose often. They *have* to, either because they're used to working with the time constraints of television, or they're subconsciously honing their daily routine toward getting *into* that spotlight. But people who want to one day do this on TV usually do it everywhere, all the time.

I've been accused of compulsive disclosure because I bare my soul in books and podcasting. (I "bug my own house so the feds don't have to!") But that's not compulsive disclosure, because people *have to go looking for it*, I don't bring it *to* them. They can quit any time they like. It's different from having someone in a room with you doing it, or even e-mailing it to you. I guess you can block e-mail any time you like, but it still feels like a bombshell when you've just started talking to someone and they tell way too much way too soon.

I try to avoid people who tell too much too soon. They are not always SVs, and sometimes rather feeble about what they are, but are they are almost universally problematic.

TURN DETRIMENTS INTO ATTRIBUTES

Here's an example of one of my "lemon to lemonade" experiences: My circadian rhythm of sleep/wake is longer than 24 hours. I think it's about 25 hours, which means that when I let my body do what it wants to do, I go to sleep and wake up a little later each day. (There's a name for this "condition", but I forget what it is. And I'm not going to look it up, because I am not a victim, so I don't need to "name" all my quirks.)

This quirk was hell when I worked in offices, so I worked hard at *not working in offices*. Anyone can do this, if they're smart, driven, and work at it constantly over a period of years.

It does take a lot of discipline. And it's very difficult if you have a victim mentality. (Unless you aspire to the title of "professional victim"!) Because a victim mentality will hold you back. You'll look for special treatment rather than climbing above adversity.

If you blame your shortcomings on *any* external force, you'll be doing yourself a disservice.

IF I CAN DO IT YOU CAN DO IT

I nearly killed myself being a drunk and a junkie while trying to get famous as a rock musician. I had a real shot at it. "I coulda been a *contenda*." I was in a great band and signed to a major label. But at that point (1991), I was my own worst enemy.

In 1994 I was recently sober, completely unknown and completely unemployable. My first job sober was washing dishes 15 hours a week. I lost that job. My second job was working as an elevator operator in an old building in San Francisco. All the other people with that job in that building were 15 or 16 years old. The job was 20 hours a week. I got fired. I felt too shell shocked from getting off drugs to even do a kid's job at this point in my life.

After losing the second job, I went on welfare for a while. When they finally cut me off, they told me that I had to go see a social worker to get my last four checks. The first three were easy. I went in and went through the motions to convince the social worker that I was working on becoming self-supporting. I even convinced myself of this, though I think my "plan" was really some magical thinking B.S. that my fortune would somehow just turn around on its own. I didn't hate the *idea* of work, but just felt incapable of doing anything that anyone wanted to pay me to do.

When I went in to get that final check, my usual social worker was sick. The guy taking her caseload was a tough cookie. He almost yelled at me, "*You've been sober for almost a year and you're still on welfare?* That's *pathetic*! My second week in rehab they made me go out and get a full-time job mopping floors! You're smart. You need to go to college. I'm sending you to college to learn computers."

"But I don't have any money," I complained.

"San Francisco City College is free."

"I don't have a car."

He looked at my file to see my address. "It's four blocks from your apartment. You can walk….It'll be good for you." He pushed the college catalog across the desk to me. I glanced at it and noticed that classes had already started a week earlier. I figured this was my out and said, "Classes have already started." He said, "I'll make a call." And did.

This was in 1996.

I started learning computers, and also took some basic writing classes. Then I took a class called "Job Prep" and learned to write a resume. In that class we also did mock job interviews, videotaped them, and the teacher critiqued the tapes in front of the class to help us have a better chance at getting a job.

I was taking baby steps at being adult at an age when most people are married, buying a house and raising children.

By 1997, I'd finished these classes and started temp work in offices, doing data entry. I'd never worked in offices before. In fact, back when I'd been a bike messenger, I'd had total contempt for anyone who worked in an office. But with time, I was finally learning that not every part of my "absolutely correct world view" at any given point in my life was something that I had to cling to for my entire life.

My sister gave me an old, used 386 computer running Windows 3.1. In the evening I worked on my own, learned more and more skills, with my "addict mind" that was really happy to be working again. I always needed stimulation and now found it in computers – there was always something new to learn, they always had something to offer.

I turned my problem of requiring stimulation into something useful to my present and my future. I sponged up knowledge by the bucketful, and was a *very* quick study.

That was a dozen years ago. I now make a living doing what I love, I get fan mail for doing it, and thousands of people have told me that I've changed their life for the better.

It took me seven years to go from junkie bum to self-sufficient and recognized writer and filmmaker. And then a couple more years to become happy and sane.

Then I got and married to a wonderful gal. I never used to think I'd ever get married…thought that was for squares. But I love it.

And I make a living working at home doing something I love to do (which was always my dream), and have since 2001.

A lot more things happened since I first got sober. My mother died, which made me horribly sad. I had a few very short drug relapses. One almost killed me with an intravenous methamphetamine OD. (Meth was not my drug of choice, but in a relapse, one sometimes goes for the easiest thing to get.) Another time I nearly lost a leg from a needle infection and spent 11 days in the hospital.

I'm currently many years clean, married, and happy most of the time. I would be *totally* happy, but I'm still dealing with my daughter's death. I'm not being a victim about it, but still think about her every day. It happened less than three years ago. But I'm doing as well as could be imagined. Because I don't play the eternal victim with any hardships, and I stay away from "it will always be good" magical thinking.

If you expect to live a life without challenges, you should be prepared for a lot of disappointment.

Again: Expectations are appointments with resentments.

STOP BEING A VICTIM

"Pull yourself up by your boot straps." "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch." *Get over it*, whether you were abused as a child, you grew up poor, or your ancestors didn't hop ashore from the Mayflower.

I was molested at age eight by a member of my babysitter's family. I was a latchkey kid and my parents were divorced. I was burned by bullies and ended up in the hospital at 14. I became a drunk by 18 and a heroin addict by 23.

But I turned my life around and pulled myself up and don't blame any of my addictions on anybody but myself. I take responsibility for my actions. It's weakness to blame negative behavior on outside events: "the abuse made me do it"; "daddy didn't love me", "the drugs made me do it"; "the Lyme Disease made me do it", or "I am disadvantaged because of my family tree." In former times a popular one was "I was possessed by the devil." (Though that *still* flies with some people.)

Don't staple your hand to your forehead by letting your self-victimization keep you from what you want to do, from what you *can* do. Sure, you'll get a certain amount of mileage from the many people who love a victim, who venerate a martyr, but that's not real. Be *real*. Don't blame others for your problems.

> Also, don't blame *yourself* for things that are *out of your control*. Accept the chaos and statistics, put it in the past, and move on.

I've seen people with a less crappy upbringing than mine commit violent crimes and blame it on their childhood. I've seen people with a perfectly happy childhood do horrible things to themselves and others later in life. And I've certainly seen a lot of people who were straight-up violent criminals, absolute grind-me-into-cat food candidates, genuinely destructive, mercenary, narcissistic felons turn their lives around, especially in recovery.

THERE'S NO FREE LUNCH. EARN YOUR KEEP ON PLANET EARTH!
People who file nuisance civil lawsuits are another form of professional victims. Sometimes they want to legislate an apology. But some of them are purely cat-food-on-the-hoof who *don't want to work*. They look for people to "wrong" them, and then sue. It's as if to say, "I don't want to work. You go to work, and give me your money." That's stealing.

You may ask why I place such a value on "work." Because work is part of the way you pay your keep on planet Earth. It's a minimum-entry level requirement to exist.

The government should not give money to *anybody*, because that means taking money from others in order to do so. If you believe in a free-market economy, then you also believe that people with valuable and worthwhile ideas will succeed based upon their merits, and those who cannot create will survive in a support capacity (generally, this means administrative work, semi-skilled labor and physical labor). Those unable to create new ideas and unwilling to provide support, will starve. Or be shot by an armed citizen while initiating force to steal. *Survival of the fittest*.

> Our system is not set up this way anymore. At all. It's tending more and more each year to nanny everyone, and to pay more and more people *not* to work. Because of this, *our system will eventually collapse*. We're seeing the beginning of the end now. Oh, things may turn around for a moment because of the bailouts and such, but it's morphine when an aspirin would have worked. And the patient has become a morphine addict.

> "Well, if you're gonna buy a ticket on the Titanic, you might as well go First Class."
> --Captain Audie Murphy, Texas Ranger, in "Roswell, Texas" by L. Neil Smith, Rex May and Scott Bieser.

STOP BEING A VICTIM, *SERIOUSLY*

Part of my solution is to make my own world, not allow hardships I had in the past be a barrier to my future. I refuse to be a martyr, and move on. I worked for years at two jobs (a day job, and a night "job" writing) before I ever made a dime writing, all so I could quit my day job and not have a boss.

Anyone can take control of their own destiny. A prevailing quandary of our society (exacerbated by the Recovery Industry and its cross-pollination with psychotherapy) is that we're headed toward being a *world* of martyrs, of victims of "special interests", who parade their hurt for our applause. It happens at many 12-step meetings. It happens on talk shows. It happens from people's homes, via YouTube. It happens anywhere anyone will listen.

SERVICE IS IMPORTANT, RANDOM CHARITY IS OPTIONAL

It's important to be of service to people in the world. It's what you do after you do the entry level human requirement of "work." But "service" doesn't have to mean writing a check, or giving a handout. It can be talking and listening to people. It can be teaching a skill to someone else. It can be anything that is, well, of service.

You don't have to give of your possessions or money. For a lot of people, embracing the victim mentality makes them feel bad if they're not constantly giving, especially financially.

Keep your money. Keep it to build your own world, until you have enough for you and those you love who deserve it, to be comfortable for the rest of your lives. *Then* give of your money if you want. But you still don't *have* to. Anyone who tells you otherwise, whether they're begging at your door, holding a tattered cup on the street, or initiating government charity from the floor of Congress, is a thief.

THE ONLY LIBERTARIAN BUM IN LOS ANGELES

Let me tell you a true parable about the guy we call "the only libertarian bum in Los Angeles."

Debra Jean told me, "I saw a homeless man huddled in a back alley this morning as I got off the freeway. He was surrounded by four cats, and was petting one as a couple others rubbed up against him. It made me ache to see them all there like

that, but the look of peacefulness and caring on his face, as he stroked the one cat, and seemed to coo at the others, made me weep."

When Debra Jean told me this, we both cried. We feel so incredibly fortunate to not be homeless, especially because we have a nice place for our cats. We decided to make a goody bag for the cats and the man. We packed a can of wet cat food, a couple pounds of dry cat food, a Heinlein book, a pen and a pad of paper, bottles of water and some snack food for the guy. (If the guy didn't have cats, we wouldn't have been moved, cried, or gone out of our way to help him. We were trying to help the cats, since they had less choice in the situation than he did. We included treats for the man because it seemed mean to feed the cats and not him.)

Debra Jean took the treats with her to work the next day. Again she saw the cat man. She drove up, offered him the bag we put together. She said, "I brought some snacks for you and your cats."

He glared back at her, said, "Fuck you. We don't need your pity."

Our horoscope that day (not that we believe in horoscopes, but since we are both the same sign – Gemini - we get a kick out of reading it): "A new friend wants to take things to a deeper level."

This guy really set me straight on my need to give handouts to the less fortunate. I feel like he was sent by the universe to teach us a lesson.

> I was homeless for a while, in 1984. I had no pride about it. If someone had handed me a bag of food, I would have *gladly* taken it. And I would have really appreciated a book and a pen.

RECLAIM THE NEST!
You don't have to support your adult kids. Once they're 18, kick 'em out if you want to. You did your bit, and giving them wings to fly is the best thing you can do for them. If they're serious about college, help them with that if you want. But there's no reason your 25-year-old (or 30-year-old, or older) offspring should be living with you, unless you *absolutely enjoy* their company. If they're living with you and sponging and making your life hell, show them the door.

This is even *more* true if they're addicts or alcoholics or full of rage and still living at home once they become adults. I always want to yell at the parents on those TV programs that bring cameras into interventions. First, an intervention is an *absolutely private* matter and there should be no audience watching at home on TV. This is humiliating, and damaging to the person trying to recover. Because he isn't aware that's going to happen. They ambush them on those shows, telling

the addict he's simply participating in a "documentary about addiction." (Which is different from my "teaching hospital" attitude with my life, because *I choose to do so*. If you chose *for* me, that would be an initiation of force.)

Secondly, I want to yell at those parents because they put up with being codependent with the kids *for so damn long*. I'd kick those kids to the curb. As a recovering addict and alcoholic, I know that it's the *only* thing that could really be done for the offspring, and more importantly, to help the parents.

You can't help someone like that except by example. As long as you're supporting an addict (or even a non-addict who just thinks the world owes them a living), you're making it worse for them. They will never have a chance to grow spiritually as long as you're helping them die by giving them three hots and a cot. Because they'll never hit bottom. I know from experience and I really believe that hitting bottom and running out of options is the only thing that can catalyze someone out of complacency or self-destruction and jolt them into productive action. They can't do it if you keep buying them lunch and letting them use drugs in your house. *That's just helping them use drugs*. "If they keep doin' what they're doin', they'll keep gettin' what they got."

So will you.

> Kids under 18 may require a different approach. With minor children, I'd recommend you consult the appropriate experts. But with kids 18 or over, if they're drivin' you nuts, *all bets are off.*

AN ADVENTURE IN FAMILY

I was out with my friend one day and a moving truck drove by. My friend read the side of it. It said "An Adventure in Moving." He laughed and said, "When I move, I don't *want* an adventure. I want it to go smoothly."

The same is true of *family*. Of course, family things will never go *completely* smoothly, because people have free wills and conflicting agendas. But do you really want "an adventure in family?" I sure don't. Reminds me of the Chinese curse "May you live in interesting times."

Conflict *is* the essence of drama, but again, you don't want excess drama in your life. It works better on the TV screen happening to someone else than in your living room happening to you.

> (Father speaking to son):
> "When you moved into your own apartment, we agreed to live as friends. As my friend your opinions are welcome. But that does not

> make you free to interfere between your mother – my wife – and myself."
> --Robert A. Heinlein, *Farnham's Freehold*

The bottom line is this: You have to help yourself before you're in any condition to help someone else. You can't help yourself when you're being a full-time caretaker to someone who should take care of themselves. Doing that tends to makes you a full-time victim. And you can't help anyone, *including* yourself, if you're playing the victim.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM MY DAUGHTER'S DEATH
My only child died in 2006.

My daughter Amelia Laine Worth was 22. She had Leukemia. She'd had it for three years. Amelia fought a brave fight, went through dozens of procedures and scores of visits to doctors and hospitals. She'd been prodded, poked, and poisoned, all in an effort to produce a clean bill of health. Shortly before she died, she basically told me, "If chemo doesn't work this time, I don't mind dying. I am just sick of all this garbage, and I just want to be a normal kid having a normal life."

She didn't give up, she just accepted whatever came her way.

I was with her when she had her last chemotherapy. It was a new drug, one they hadn't tried, one that had some very scary side-effects. It was a last last last resort.

Amelia was in pain, so they'd given her morphine. Morphine is God's gift of comfort for people in agony. (It's *not* for people feeling sorry for themselves, which is how I'd abused it earlier as an addict. Morphine is not for professional victims, it's for *real* victims.)

Amelia was heavily groggy from the painkiller and asked me to read her the two-page list of possible side effects before they hooked up the drip of chemo. She looked like a crumpled angel. I said, "Are you sure?" She said, "Yes."

I read it to her. The list enumerated everything from vomiting to loss of hair. From loss of hearing to loss of sight. Loss of limb to loss of *life*. And pretty much everything in between.

She made a sleepy joke about it. She said, "Blindness? Brain damage? Death? Well, if *that's* all that might happen, let's do it."

I laughed, but it was hard to see my little child like this. A few weeks earlier, she'd looked relatively healthy when she'd come down to LA between chemo treatments to see me and to go to Disneyland. She'd never been to Disneyland. She'd told her mother, "I want to do that before I die."

> People say, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." I'd have to add "…except chemo."

When Amelia died, I was devastated. Slayed. I couldn't sleep for months. I questioned my trust in God. I felt sorry for myself. I played the victim for a little while. Which is natural…it was part of my grieving and healing process.

But I didn't make a *lifestyle* out of it, and I determined to get through it. I thought about the fact that Amelia never played the victim, even when she was dying. I know people who whine for days when someone cuts in front of them in line. But Amelia faced death without playing the victim.

That's what I learned from her death, and it finally enabled me to stop playing the victim.

For good.

> **ACTION:**
> - **Make a list of people you know who "play the victim."**
> - **Make a list of times you've "played the victim", and ways that has kept you from your goals.**
> - **Stop putting up with people who "play the victim."**
> - ***Stop being a victim yourself*.**

MOVING ON...
We've spent the first twelve chapters of this book dealing with removing bad habits from our lives. We've dealt with codependence, serenity vampires, substance addiction, even addiction to meetings. We've learned about what matters in life and what doesn't. We've learned about integrity and presenting oneself in the world. And we've learned how (and why) to not be a victim.

PESD is only half of LifeAmp. And it's been a big job, no? But good on you, if you've taken the steps to make progress. That's what life is all about.

> **Regardless of your age, the day you stop being teachable is the day you become old.**

SO…now that you have a slate relatively clean of clutter, it's time to fill your plate with *positive* patterns and people.

As you might guess, for me, "positive patterns" means work. Work at something you love.

The remainder of the book is going to be about doing work that you love. This is the second half of the LifeAmp plan.

In Chapter Thirteen, "Work Smarter" and Chapter Fourteen, "Time Management for Calm and Profit" we'll deal with doing what you love, just for the sake of doing it.

In Chapter Fifteen, "Make a Living Doing Something You Love", we'll progress to getting *paid* for living our dreams.

In Chapter Sixteen, "Organization Building" we'll learn how to interface with positive people to effectively work in small, highly mobile ad-hoc companies and organizations. Here you can "find your tribe", do something great, and make your mark on the world.

Finally, we'll close with Chapter Seventeen, "Letter to a Young Me", where I tell you *what it was like, what it's like now, and where I'm headed*.

Let's start with learning how to work smarter….

Chapter 13 – Work Smarter

This is where we step out of "get rid of weenies" mode and step into "now that you've got your life more in order, let's *do* something with it."

> There's a story my dad likes to tell: Billionaire industrialist Henry Ford was giving a tour of his company to a group of investors. They went by an office where a guy was staring out the window, feet up on the sill, his back to the door, watching birds outside on a tree.
>
> After the group got out of hearing range of the daydreamer, one of the investors asked Ford, "Why do you keep such a lazy man on your payroll?"

> Ford replied, "That 'lazy man' came up with our three most profitable ideas of last year. And he was sitting in that same position when he came up with all of them!"

Sometimes the best way to start solving a problem is to daydream a little, let your mind out of its cage and just free associate.

The second half of this chapter is a section called On Professionalism. It's pure step-by-step information on being a pro. At anything.

But first, I'm gonna free associate for half a chapter…little pithy self-contained nuggets. Parables, if you will. I'm going to step out of "school mode" and sit down and *just* riff with ya.

OLD ME, MEET THE NEW ME….
When I was younger I often wondered, "If me now could meet me when I'm older, would we *like* each other?"

I have always wondered about the future, where my life is headed. I think that's part of the process of fine-tuning as you go. Self-examination is *key*.

I always wanted to utilize the media to scratch outside my physical surroundings and touch the world. When I was a kid, I fetishized books. I petted them in the library, imagining the fabulous lives of the humans who wrote them. I assumed these people all lived in mansions and had many remarkable friends.

When I was 11, I built an FM radio transmitter into the handset of an old telephone. It had a range of about 200 feet. I have no idea if anyone ever heard me, but I'd walk around my little town, speaking my little thoughts into this megaphone to eternity. I felt that I was painting my brain onto the ether, and it seemed more remarkable to me than speaking with my human peers.

Later, when I became a published writer, I felt I'd *arrived*. I'd pound the keys with the ferocity of the hundred tons of dynamite that would etch my words through the millions of layers of papyrus that would comprise the totality of all the copies that would eventually be sold.

I've lived in cities all my adult life. A few years back, I got married and moved out to the country.

I used to think that I had to have junkies pawing through my garbage cans to really feel alive, to have my "finger on the pulse" as an artist. And I thought that to move out of the city was to "give up." Now I know differently. I love it here,

and find that I'm *far* more creative when I'm not concerned on a minute-to-minute basis with not being mugged.

I think the young me would have a lot of admiration for the current me if we'd met. I'm not square, but I'm not crazy. I do what I love, and get paid for it. I'm digging being married, and I'm digging living in the country. And I'm about to turn 45 years old.

Pretty good for a city boy who swore he'd be dead by 30.

THE POETRY OF SCIENCE
Computers are an interesting mixture of science and voodoo. You can change the world from your bedroom, through the magic of a phosphorus screen shocked by gold hairs powered by a spinning lodestone. I see computers as a means, not an end. Digital processing is but a tool to scratch my thoughts into the sky, and into the future.

He who dies with his art on the most hard drives, wins.

ANALYZE "HIYA JOES"
"Hiya joes" are people at your day job and in your life who say "Hi!" every time you meet them. They rarely say much else, but if you don't say "Hi" back, they will take it as an affront. They think they have some sort of *relationship* with you, but they don't.

The term "hiya joe" can also apply to people who talk a little more than just saying "hi", but only make small talk…boring small talk about the weather, the big game last night, that annual Hollywood awards show, or anything insignificant. They're time-wasting mosquitoes, whether at work or elsewhere.

In an office environment, your computer network interface has no icon for "Delete Problem People Near You." So keep saying "hi" back to the ones at work so you can help keep your job a while longer, but remember, sooner or later, "I'm *outta* here."

Think about what you're really *doing* when you *hiya joe*. Add up all the time you spend doing that for a lifetime, and you probably could have learned a language or taken a *long* vacation.

Your day job is probably a very inefficiently run work place. Most are. You could probably do better. At least when you work at home, when you're sick you don't have to go in anyway and make everyone else sick. And when you work at home, your commute is about ten seconds. That's what we're working toward

for you. Think about that while Joe or Betty Sue at the office is yammering on to you.

DRIVE AND FOCUS

You'll need discipline; people without a boss often don't work. Some people who wish they could quit their day job would be begging for it back in a month, just out of boredom, if not starvation.

DON'T THANK PEOPLE IN ADVANCE

Thanking someone in advance when you're asking them for something is a bad idea. It's expecting someone to do something. Puts pressure on them. Thank them after. If they're doing something now, in order to decide if they will do something later, thank them in a timely manner for each part. I did that with the people who blurbed this book. I asked them if they'd read it and consider writing a blurb. When they said they'd look at it, I thanked them for taking the time. When they read it decided they liked it enough to actually *write* a blurb for the back cover, I thanked them again. Because they did two different things: took the time to read the whole book and see if they'd want to write a blurb, then actually *wrote* the blurb. They could have read the book, and said they didn't want to blurb it, and I still would have appreciated that they took the time to read it.

ONE MORE ADVANTAGE OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT

My wife's 401(k) has dropped 1/3 in value in the past nine months. We recently did some math and figured out that if she'd been "allowed" to invest for herself for the past fifteen years, and had bought gold every year with *her* money (as she could if she worked at home), even without the matching funds from her company, her retirement money would be worth *three times more* than it was worth last year, not 1/3 less than it was worth last year.

GET RICH QUICK. OR NOT.

There are no get-rich-quick solutions. Well, at least there aren't any sold on TV. If you see an ad that makes you think, "Man, this *Shortcuts to Making Millions Selling Duct Tape On The World Wide Web* system will put my grandkids through rehab someday!", well, sorry. The only person getting rich off of these get-rich-quick systems is the guy selling the system.

DO EVERYTHING AS IF YOU'LL BE REMEMBERED FOR ONLY *THAT ONE THING*

I do everything I do with the idea that it might be the one thing I am remembered for, because it just might be. I give the same mindset to working on a year-long book that I spend answering a single respectful e-mail from a stranger. I take this same care with brushing my cat's fur, vacuuming the house

(all that cat hair!) or eating my dinner. It's all part of a big equation, the long, beautiful science and math project that is my life, and it's all equally important.

My wife and I did voiceover for my friend Alan's YouTube parody video, "Now That's What I Call Emo."
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RDw9yx7gEM

He paid us 50 bucks, but we did it as if we were getting ten-thousand bucks. He's a really good friend, and we would have done it for free.

We did a great job. And did it promptly, and made sure the audio files were perfect from a technical point of view, too.

We ended up getting a lot more well-paid work from this.

Also, this video has had *over a million views*. Nothing I've ever done has been seen by that many people. We had no *idea* it would be this popular, but did it as well as we could regardless.

Wouldn't it be funny if this video is *all* we're remembered for? What if our epitaphs one day read, "Here lie the folks who did the fake emo parody commercial."

> This won't happen, we've put in our wills that we don't want to be buried and don't want a headstone. We're going to be cremated. And I want my ashes to be hand loaded into shotgun shells and given to my friends.

NO REGRETS
Nothing you do is a loss if you *learn* from it.

If I had my life to live over, there's *nothing* I would change that I could have changed.

And I've started about five books I haven't finished in the past two years (although I did finish two books in that time, including the YouTube book I wrote with Alan).

None of those "failed" attempts are really failures. They were trial runs and research for this book. This book is the fruition of that work. It's what I was really *meant* to write all along. I just had to write a few hundred thousand words and throw them away first.

BURNED BY A FIRE
Steve Albini says, "It's better to learn from other people's mistakes. If you can learn from someone else being horribly burned in a fire, it's better than being horribly burned in a fire yourself."

NOT EVERYONE WILL "GET" WHAT YOU DO, BUT THE PEOPLE WHO GET IT WILL LOVE IT
A guy named John wrote this to me in an e-mail: "At the time I first discovered your stuff (can't remember what came first, *D.I.Y. OR DIE* or *$30 Film School*) I was really inspired by your work. I told my girlfriend, 'This guy *gets* it. He gets that marketing is 80% of it!' It was refreshing to discover a creative type who doesn't mind doing the leg work and the promo work, etc."

I told John: "It's not just marketing, it's *ongoing maintenance*."

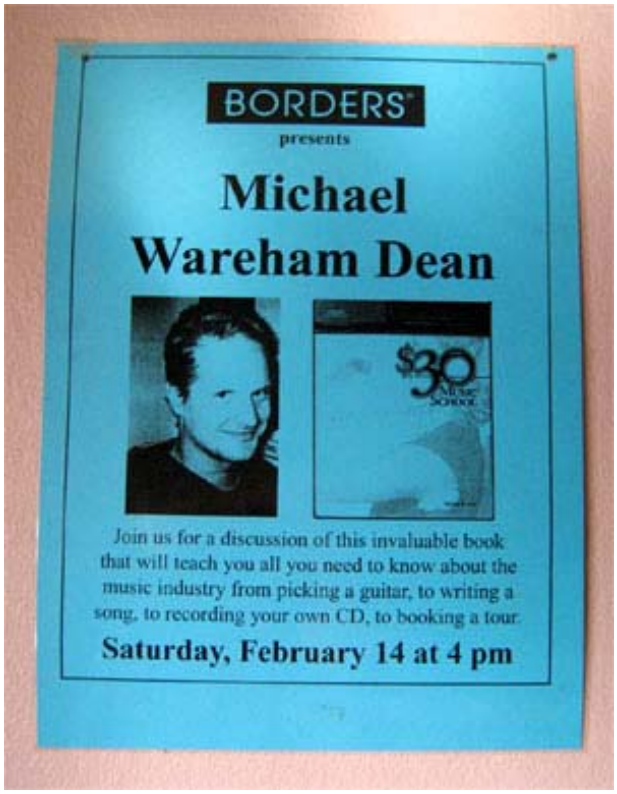
BORDERS
presents
Michael
Wareham Dean
$30
Join us for a discussion of this invaluable book that will teach you all you need to know about the music industry from picking a guitar, to writing a song, to recording your own CD, to booking a tour.
Saturday, February 14 at 4 pm

Figure 13.1
Getting' it out to the *people*

A hugely popular independent musician friend of mine said he is often asked, "What's it like playing music for a living?" He replied, "I don't play music for a living. It's 5 PM. I've been up since 6 AM. I've spent my day making phone calls, sending faxes, going to the post office, and dealing with computer problems. I haven't played any music at all today."

WHO CARES ABOUT ANGELINA'S DRESS?
Keeping up with Hollywood will not make you a more effective human being. (Unless you're a fashion designer.) Don't pay attention to the public-private lives of famous people. Thinking a lot about people you've never met, imagining you know them on a first-name basis, is sad and a little creepy. *Get your own damn life*.

SPEAKING WAS THE FIRST COMMUNICATION. AND IT WILL BE THE LAST.
Spoken audio is more immediate than written communication. Verbal communication predates written history, music, science, even agriculture. Spoken storytelling is the most basic and immediate and personal of all communication. Verbal communication is the basis of written communication, which is the basis of all law. (I don't like most laws, but it's important to *understand* them.) Verbal communication is needed for science, commerce, art, religion, and manufacturing. Verbal communication is the basis of civilization.

So many people (including me) have spent so much energy making futuristic art - video art, computer art, art that could not have existed even a few years ago, that many people have lost track of the fact that it's all about the *story*. And one person talking to another person is the *story* at the most basic level. There is a lot of stunningly produced visual art that has no real story. That's boring.

I've become far more interested lately in going "backwards", going back to written and even to spoken audio. Podcasting is my adult realization of the childhood desire that made me put that radio transmitter into the handset of that old telephone. I want to speak to the sky; I want to speak to God, to the universe, by speaking to *you*. One-to-one communication from my home office directly to the little pod audio player clipped on your belt. To your brain. To your *soul*. With no interference from corporate gatekeepers, censors, or marketing weenies with PhDs who don't even have a high school diploma in *understanding the hearts and minds of humans*.

And you can listen to audio while walking or while driving a car. You can't read a book or watch a video while driving a car. (Well, maybe you can, but you probably *shouldn't*, at least in *my* driveway.)

DON'T FOLLOW TRENDS. *MAKE* TRENDS.
Most of my favorite movies, books, inventions, software, music and social movements never would have made it past the marketing phase if incubated in a corporation. Hell, they wouldn't have made it past the gatekeepers to get *in the lobby* of a corporation. Real progress is usually made by independent loons working in their bedrooms, basements and garages. Only when they perfect the prototype, sell a bunch on their own and get a "buzz" will the marketing weenies pay attention.

Albert Einstein was an amateur physicist who made his living in a dreary office as a patent examiner for the Swiss patent office. When he wrote his groundbreaking paper on his new Theory of Relativity, he had a hard time getting prominent professional physicists to take it seriously at first, because they were not forward-thinking enough to dig what he was laying down, *and* because he was a "nobody" in their world.

The book you're reading right now was turned down by three agents. They all liked my short "pitch" describing the book, and asked to read it. They all read it and thought it wouldn't sell.

My friend James Jose started his own physical fitness system in Australia called *448 Demystify Personal Training*:
www.ravemagazine.com.au/content/view/13041/192/

He has a unique viewpoint. He comes from a punk rock ethic and plays very aggressive, dark music in the gym. (He plays Rollins Band, KMFDM, Fugazi, Ministry, Nine Inch Nails, Killing Joke, Hammerbox, Mudhoney, The Melvins, The Misfits, The Cramps, Black Flag, Big Black, Dead Kennedys, and my old band, Bomb.) He is also is someone who used to cut himself, and now he doesn't. His devotion to fitness was a big part of his recovery from self-destruction. He teaches recovery from self-destruction as part of his physical fitness course. The course is taking off and becoming very popular. Investors are now paying attention, and coming *to him*.

If James had come up with a business plan on paper to start a gym that played angry music and included talk of self-cutting in the training, any marketing weenie or banker would have called security and had him escorted from the building. James knew this. So he just *did it*, on his own, and it's now doing well.

> James adds: "Mental Health professionals don't like that I have nothing good to say about my times on anti-depressant pills. The

> only way I truly got better was by breaking a chunk of their rules. Now, they're coming to me with speaking requests. Go figure."

A THOUGHT TO COMFORT YOU AND GUIDE YOU

One of my favorite movies, *Office Space*, contains the line "We don't have a lot of time on this earth. We weren't meant to spend it this way. Human beings were not meant to sit in little cubicles staring at computer screens all day."

You may think it ironic that I love this line when I spend most of my time staring at a computer screen. But I do it *at home*, can get up and stretch or nap. And I'm not staring at spreadsheets, working on TPS reports and answering to eight different bosses.

I'm making the things I would *want* to buy, but can't because they don't exist yet!

> **My job description in 20 words:**
> **I see things that *aren't* in the world, *should* be in the world, and *put them into the world* myself.**

THE BEST IDEAS CANNOT BE STOLEN

> The best ideas cannot be stolen, because the best ideas include *you* as an integral part of the formula.

That's why I'm willing to post all my ideas on StinkFight.com and Nestlandia.com. Many people I know hold their cards close to their chest. But if they do, it's probably not a groundbreaking project.

In 1917 the first jazz musician asked to make a recording said no. He was afraid that people would steal his ideas if they could play them back. He only wanted to play live. The second jazz act asked to record said yes. They were The Original Dixieland Jazz Band. People have heard of them. The other guy, I can't remember his name. No one can.

If someone had "stolen" my pitch for *$30 Film School* or *D.I.Y. or DIE: How to Survive as an Independent Artist* or *A User's Manual for the Human Experience*, all they could have stolen was a great *name*. No one else would have made anything even *resembling* what I did, even if they had all my notes and my outline.

And putting the pitch online early on makes it *harder*, not easier, for someone to "steal" the name or the idea. Because it establishes in public when you first thought of it.

LIVE YOUR PROCESS
My *D.I.Y. or Die* documentary film was *made* in a D.I.Y. (do it yourself) way. I was scrambling and had to "do it yourself" on *everything*. But it got made.

This book you're reading now, at least the parts on dealing with weenies, was written while dealing with a major weenie, and I was able to take my own advice and delete him from the system tray of my life *as I was working on the book*.

WORKING AGAINST THE ODDS:
I started writing this book when the economy was bad. People were not buying as many books and publishing companies were laying off executives. Even book projects that had been *paid for and completed* were being cancelled. But I wrote the book anyway, because I had something important to say.

If you're reading this, the book got published regardless of the state of the industry betting against it. It got out into the world, and probably made a few bucks, too.

FOOTWORK
Do your work, create your product or service, and work toward the future. But do not put all your hopes on the results of any one project. *Expectations are appointments with resentments.*

Do the footwork, then move on to the next thing. Have several different things going, too, so you don't bet all your work on one pony. I've seen people become suicidal over betting it all on one project, especially people trying to "make it" in Hollywood. But I've seen it elsewhere, too. I've seen it everywhere, in all areas of business.

THE WRITER'S TUBE
When I'm working on any project, I'm *totally absorbed* in it. I'm so focused that I'm barely returning calls and e-mails from family and close friends. Sounds selfish, but it isn't. It's how I get as much done as I do. I call it "the writer's tube", because it's a kind of intentionally focused tunnel vision isolation. I feel like I'm living in a tube. I also feel like I'm looking down a tube. The computer screen is my only focus.

I climb into the writer's tube and stay there for months. When something is finally published, I spend about a month promoting it, then I turn off the computer for a while. Or at least don't sit in front of it sixteen hours a day. I'll still check in to see if there are any "fires that need putting out", or any people

wanting to interview me, or order products from me. And when orders come in, I drop everything and ship *that day*. And I *never* turn down an interview, whether it's for a major national publication or a Xeroxed zine done by a kid from his bedroom.

> TIP: Be willing to do *any* interview, anywhere, anytime. But politely and firmly say that you need to have approval of the final edit. Say that you won't unreasonably withhold approval as long as you're quoted correctly and in context.
>
> Some people say, "There's no bad press as long as they spell your name right." But having been quoted incorrectly and out of context many times, I find this to be patently untrue.
>
> It's OK to do things on your terms, as long as you're confident, not cocky. One thing I do now on my own terms is I rarely do interviews via e-mail. Too much typing, and I do too much typing as it is. I do interviews via phone, Skype, or I have the person e-mail me the questions, then I record Debra Jean asking me the questions and me answering them. I send the audio file to the interviewer. They can either post it online as an audio MP3, or transcribe it themselves if they want text.

SO…after the project is "dropped" into the world, and after the month of non-stop promotion, I step away from the computer, "emerge" for a month or so, live life out in the world, and relax. I spend more time with my wife and my cats, return some phone calls, go for walks, visit a few good friends I've been ignoring, and put my feet up on the window of life and watch the birds. At this point, I often have no idea what I'll do next, and it doesn't matter.

Figure 13.2
Me replenishing my well

> I like that term "drop." Releasing a new project is like having a baby after being pregnant for a long time! Though when a project drops, it's already a young adult, and you get to watch it grow out in the world.

Once I've released my "offspring" into the world, and relaxed, I usually get an idea for the *next* project near the very end of the relaxation period. In fact, getting the idea is often what ends the relaxation period! I climb back into the writer's tube, scurry back into work mode, to the exclusion of almost everything else.

I love this process. And I get a lot done.

> If you want an audio glimpse of what goes on in my writer's tube, I recorded me and Debra Jean working for 40 minutes on the wording of one very short section of this book. (My description of God, many pages back. The part that begins "God is the sentient,

benevolent and infinite force that created the heavens and the earth….")

It's up on Radio Free Nestlandia podcast, episode 21, "How to Write a Book": http://www.nestlandia.com/2009/03/21/episode-21-how-to-write-a-book/

FAME BY ACCIDENT OR BY DESIGN?

I've met very few people who just "happened" to get famous, especially those who got famous despite appearing to not care. They usually care. A lot.

Most people think Kurt Cobain just got famous on talent. And Kurt said many times that he hated being famous. But if you look at Cobain's private diaries (which his widow published as a book) you can see he was very systematically seeking fame.

Timothy Leary is thought of as having just spontaneously emerged as the spiritual leader of the hippies, but he and Allen Ginsberg were exploiting all their contacts to get articles about them and their "mission" published by the likes of *Life* magazine and the New York Times. Leary and Ginsberg engineered fame for their ideas with the fervor of a marketing expert for a Fortune 500 company. And again, some would say, "they were marketing an important idea", but you know, and I know, that the name and face always gets to go along for the ride with the idea. They were promoting *brave new* ideas, but they were also promoting the "brand" of their own names. And that "branding" lead to book deals, speaking engagement, groupies, etc.

I think there's something a tiny bit broken about all "performers" and fame seekers. (Myself included, though my mission is to be *less* broken with time, which is the entire subject of this book.)

I've been in a room with, and chatted with, A++ list actors, top-ten rock stars, and famous writers. And while cool, smart and talented, they always had a little bit of "do you approve of me?" even when talking to someone like me, who they'd never heard of. I think that anyone who devotes their life to seeking applause maybe didn't get enough "attaboys" as a kid. But we all take this "broken" part of us, this defect of character, and turn it around into working *for* us, rather than *against* us.

The key to staying sane with this is to recognize when it's no longer working for you, then wean it out of you into something more manageable and humble.

INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF YOUR *BRAND*
Everything you do and do well, *whether it makes you money or not*, increases the brand name of "you." This makes people pay more attention to the *next* thing you do. If all your products and projects have your name on them, your *name* becomes more sellable with each success.

KEEP TRACK OF YOUR BRAND
Keep a CV, or resume. Mine's here, though I've been too busy doing more stuff that will eventually go on it to have time to update it in a while. (That's what they call "a quality problem!"):
www.kittyfeet.com/cv.htm

GIVING VS. SELLING
Sometimes, like with my podcasting, I "maintain my amateur status so I can compete in the olympics." I could make an extra couple thousand dollars a year putting ads in my podcasts and on my blogs, but I want some of my media *pure*. It's not that I don't like commerce, it's that as a media creator who is also a media *consumer*, I want to make media that *I'd* consume. And I hate most advertising. It offends me. I actually *listen* to the podcasts I make, and if they had ads, I'd have to fast forward.

SAVE THE WORLD WITH TELECOMMUTING
If more people work from home, people will need to drive less. Pollution and global warming will slow, and people will also have more available income for fun things. Accidents will go down. Frustration caused by gridlock will diminish. Quality of life will improve across the board. It's win/win for everyone.

Anyone who works in a purely information capacity can work from home, if employers will work more toward allowing this. Most bosses don't like the idea, because it's harder to yell at someone who's not in the same room. But as bosses realize that *yelling is not the best way to motivate people*, and as broadband access increases, anyone who isn't digging ditches or lifting boxes for a living will be able to work at home. We'll certainly need more fiber optic infrastructure, especially in rural areas. (And I think the free market should take care of this, not the government.)

Of course, it takes a different mindset to work at home, but people can be trained.

> I believe that everything you need to know to do this is in all the books I've written. A bookshelf containing all the books I've written and the two films I've made is a complete library on doing

> *anything* (not just art) at home for pay, and making the world a better place while doing it. That bookshelf is better than art school and maybe better than business school. (See Appendix "Recommended Reading" for the full list so you can start your own "college on one shelf.")

LIVING AND WORKING OUT ON THE ROAD

Advances in technology make it possible to be highly mobile with your craft. You really *can* live out of a backpack and make a living from your laptop.

Technology was originally looked at by us old-school hipsters as an intrusion by "The Man"- computers were something to *enslave* you, not free you. But we later learned that carefully considered use of technology can free you to make your work *fly*, get it out in the world, and even let you travel the world as you do it. (Especially if you use encryption to protect yourself and your valuable commodities in the process.) You can live with no fixed address and make a living doing what you love.

I've done it. It's a lot of work, and necessitates you cultivating a rare combination of people skills, technical skills, talent and common sense. But it's also incredibly freeing.

> Regarding the argument of technology as freeing vs. enslaving, it's probably *both*. See my note about Ray Kurzweil in the appendix. He influenced me on much of this section.

Even when I *have* a fixed address, I spend a lot of my time working while I travel and I have traveled a lot in my work. And I love it. I recommend you consider working toward doing this, because it's great way to live.

NANOCORPS

A *nanocorp* is a highly mobile small corporation or partnership (composed of between two and ten people) working over the Internet. You can be anywhere, and so can your partner(s). We creative types are no longer tied to a physical location, and we're no longer tied to having to show up at the same place at the same time every day and sit in neat little rows. The workplace of the past is dead. Work can now be done in any configuration of workers, from anywhere. You can travel the world running your companies from a laptop.

> NOTE: You can now travel the world running your companies from a laptop *even without the laptop*. Some people do this with Puppy Linux (which is free). You can install Puppy Linux on a tiny USB drive. http://www.puppylinux.com/flash-puppy.htm

You can have your whole operating system, programs, *and documents* on the USB drive, keep it in your pocket, and take it with you to *run from any computer*…from web cafés, libraries or friends' houses. And doing this leaves *no trail of files on the computer you're using*, unlike with Microsoft and Apple operating systems.

You can also encrypt the USB drive in case it's lost or otherwise compromised. Here's a video on how to do that:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nemmSS5mqDA&feature=related

I don't know how to do this myself. I do use TrueCrypt, which is easy for basic things, but as you can tell, I'm *not a very tech-savvy person*, and cannot *for the life of me understand this video* about creating a *plausible deniability* volume:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpsiQogo4x4

But I *imagine* someone would fill the dummy volume with things that are *legal*, but that many people *might want to hide:* bad poetry, run-of-the-mill porn, AA 4th step, list of failed diets, an unfinished and unpublishable novel, etc.

I would certainly never recommend that anyone break the law. I mention these possibilities for educational purposes only. I feel that "*The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects*", as guaranteed in the Fourth Amendment of The Constitution of the United States, has been severely compromised lately by the ever-expanding federal government taking precedent over states' rights and individual liberties.

(More on Nanocorps in Chapter Sixteen, "Organization Building.")

SEEKING

I've always loved seeking. My mother thought I might end up being a preacher. That wasn't her projecting. It was *a good bet* when I was 12 or 13. I liked the Bible and was charismatic from a young age…well read, could engage any adult in complex conversation and hold my own in debates. I was an excellent public speaker, a budding leader of men. I was probably destined to be a preacher, a politician, a salesman, or a rock star.

I went with "rock star" for a while. While preachers have some cool music too, and preachers, politicians and rock stars enjoy good lighting (which was probably an important consideration for me at the time), rock stars don't have to

wear ties. And I hate wearing a tie. Ties feel to me like something between a leash collar and a noose.

I wore ties five days a week for four years at The Church Farm School, the boarding school I got shipped off to after my parents split up and I started getting into trouble without a strong father figure present in my daily life.

I do have to thank my dad for my do-it-yourself workaholic spirit. He may not have taken me to a lot of baseball games, but he taught by example, and he passed on his ancestors' pioneer genes. These two things made me much of what I am today. His legacy will be everything he's done, plus me having his last name.

> I like the name. "Dean" is from the same Latin root as "decimal." Dean means "one who leads ten soldiers." I'll take that. (And "Michael" is Hebrew for "Who is like God?")

I would have been a great preacher. I'm still charismatic, still love to seek, and with the amount of drugs I used to do in my late 20s, I'd have a great story of redemption. Salvation is certainly more sellable if you have a solidly sordid past. How are you going to convince sinners to repent if you haven't sinned your *own* ass off?

In other words, how can a "wretch like me" now *see*, unless I "once was blind"?

And I'm not talking a made-up past, not an exaggerated past that one would later have to go on Oprah to apologize for having embellished. I will never have to hang my head in shame and say, "Oh, I'm sorry Miss Oprah. I know I told you I was a do-or-die junkie, but actually, I just did a bong hit and fell off my skateboard."

Nope. I'll never have to un-tell my truths, because my truths are true. I should be dead. Many times over. (Though I did do a bong hit and fall off my skateboard a few times, too!)

IS LIFE FAIR? (2)
One time, I was feeling sorry for myself and said to my friend, "It's not fair. It's just not fair. Life isn't fair."

He said, "WELL THANK GAWD FOR THAT YOU DUMMY! If life were fair, Michael, you and I would *both* be dead."

It was some great tough love that I needed to hear. But like many spiritual transformations, it didn't work immediately. It took a while. This book is part of the record of that journey. Not the end of that journey, but the work-in-progress that is life. This book is just a cross section of a sliver of my time. This is a teaching hospital, and I'm showing you the process *as it happens*.

> OK, that's enough riffing and free associating. Time for the second half of this chapter, as promised. Let's get back to *business*….

ON PROFESSIONALISM

> "My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute."
> --Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*

Basically, a large part of being a success in the world is interacting with people in a professional manner. It's often the difference between being well employed and being unemployed.

Years ago when I lived in San Francisco I was talking to a guy I know who is an amazing hot shot rock drummer. He and I were talking about another drummer who is a less-flashy player, a much more stable person, less prone to mood swings, and always punctual. The hot shot was complaining to me that the other guy was constantly employed as a session musician, even though the hot shot was technically a better drummer.

The reason the other guy was more employed was that he *gave the producers what they wanted*, and was *easy to work with*. The hot shot always tried to make his drumming *noticed*, whereas the other guy "served the song." The other guy didn't play like a robot, wasn't a staunch "yes man." He *would* give his opinion when he felt it helped the project, but didn't try to *insert himself into* the project. That guy had professionalism; the hot shot didn't.

A big part of professionalism is how you communicate with people. This can range from keeping your word, to having good e-mail netiquette, to simply working well with others, to *delivering* regardless of what's happening that week in your own life. People like to hire and collaborate with folks who make their lives *easier*, not harder, so you should practice "playing well with others" *in all that you do*.

TREAT PEOPLE AS YOU'D LIKE TO BE TREATED
The Golden Rule that we were taught in kindergarten ("do unto others as you would have them do unto you") works even more so in the grown-up working world. (It's more or less a shortened version of The Only Two Rules in Life.)

If you wish to remain employed, employable, and in demand, be *decent*. Project directors who deal with contractors in any field, be it media production or building construction, will re-hire decent, moderately talented, hard-working people *that they like working with* more often than they will hire high-emotional-maintenance hot shots who are geniuses.

KEEP YOUR WORD
If you commit to deadlines on projects, meet them. Don't let a bad day (or year) get in the way.

I was wrapping up a three-year project, putting it to bed with creating and shipping the art files for the cover off to the DVD distribution company the week my daughter died. I *finished this work on time*, even though it was very hard to do so. There were people depending on me finishing the work, they'd already set up the manufacturing and distribution dates to get this in their pipeline.

Me finishing up *regardless* of chaos and statistics isn't "suffering for my art"; it's *keeping my word*.

Don't tell the person you're dealing with your whole life (or even week) story. Don't say "I'm sorry that I'm going to be a day late on this upcoming deadline, but my car got a flat tire and I had to take the car in and then had to have my friend come pick me up and we got stuck in traffic on the 405 because there was an overturned big rig leaking Marshmallow Fluff everywhere and my girlfriend has the flu and I had to go pick up some fruit for her because that's all she can eat without throwing up right now and these deadlines are making me squitteny and I want to scream!"

Instead, *as soon as you think you might be late*, calmly say, "I am going to be a day late on the deadline this time. I hope that's OK, and I don't see it happening again for the duration of this project."

HAVE GOOD NETIQUETTE
Spellcheck e-mails, and read them before you send them.

Don't spam people.

Don't *cc* when you should *bcc*. Don't bcc when you should not copy *anyone*. And if you don't know the difference, learn the difference:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_copy#E-mail
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_carbon_copy

Also, don't cc everyone involved on a project on every back-and-forth e-mail, unless you've been asked to. It just makes more effort for everyone involved to read things they don't need to, and that's time they could all spend doing something else.

Be careful what you forward to people. Don't forward political e-mails or puppy parade stories to friends and coworkers who haven't specifically asked you for it. That is not communication, that's *spam*.
www.lifeamp.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=8

You shouldn't forward crap like that (jokes, cat photos, etc.) to people you're working with, unless that's how they roll. (Although if they roll like that, chances are they're not terribly well-employed, and you will probably be better served to look for other people to work with in the future.)

You don't have to be a *robot* in your communications; there is a little room for levity, but keep in mind that in a huge ongoing project that will require thousands of e-mails over a year's time, all the crap you forward is going to slow the work down a lot.

And don't get overly chatty with people and send a lot of non-work-related e-mails, unless it is how they do things. Same rules apply as with spam e-mail.

Know that some people use e-mail more like instant messenger, once a project is rolling at a high rate of speed. They don't put a salutation and sign-off on each e-mail. This isn't them being rude; it's them optimizing time and workflow. (I do this. And I do *not* use instant messenger. Ever. People use it too much for non-work related things when they're feeling chatty, and it interrupts workflow. If I want to chat with someone, I'll *pick up the phone*. And when I get them on the phone, I'll ask them, "Do you have time to chat?" before launching into my yakin'.)

Don't send e-mails when you're in a bad mood. Step away from the computer if you're not feeling civil. Keep your communications short and to the point; remember that a lot of people dealing with a large workflow read e-mails very quickly. Have a short, descriptive subject line that tells the reader what the e-mail is about. And for Pete's sake, *change the subject line to a new descriptive phrase* when a conversation changes course.

If you get anything you do reviewed in a major publication, send the person a thank you e-mail. Make it short and to the point. Hold on to their e-mail address, *but don't spam them with every little thing you do*. Send them a well-written press release e-mail (with all the facts, all the links, and none of the fluff) when you've got something *big* happening, something that will make a good story for *them*. I probably do this *once a year or less* with people like that. I save it for the big stuff. (Like this book.)

CHECK YOUR WORK
And have someone else check your work too.

You should not only spellcheck and read aloud in your head each e-mail before sending it, you should also spell check *twice* anything that's going out to the public or being mass produced in any way. And then have someone else check it (and maybe a third someone, too) before you send it to the presser. A second set of eyes is always helpful; a second (and third) person will find mistakes that you don't find in something that you wrote, because your mind will fill in mistakes with what you *meant* to type. There is little more embarrassing than printing 10,000 promotional postcards, mailing them out, and then realizing you spelled your company's name wrong. (I know because I've done it!)

I am constantly amazed at how many companies' actual *names* contain typo's…I mean typos.

It's not *Sallys' Rose's*. It's *Sally's Roses.*

Having everything checked by a second set of (smart) eyes is especially important with anything that's being *self*-published, where you don't have editors on staff to look at it later. *Your typos won't correct themselves on the store bookshelf*, ya know? *The Internet* won't correct them for you.

I check everything myself, but also run everything important I do by someone else (usually my wonderful and very smart wife, since I live with her, since she's good at proofing and editing, and she loves to help me), before sending it to anyone, even when it's going off to a team of editors later. Editors don't like to have to proofread as well as edit.

The fewer mistakes there are in the early drafts of your work, whether it's writing or a blueprint for that skyscraper, the more effective highly specialized pros can be when you collaborate with them to really make it *shine*. You don't want the person who makes 80 dollars an hour to have to clean up mistakes that could have been cleaned up by someone who works for ten dollars an hour, *or by*

you. The less "noise" and the more "signal", the more the experts you hire (or your company hires) can do with their *limited and expensive time*.

BE PREPARED FOR *ANYTHING*, AND HONE *ALL* YOUR SKILLS
This is a useful plan for when someone wants to hire you and needs something right away. People who can pull that off, *without making mistakes* and *without complaining*, are very employable. And you can usually charge more when you do something on a heavy deadline.

> If you make a mistake, admit it. It's not only living by The Only Two Rules in Life, it will keep you employed and get you hired back more than hiding mistakes that will invariably be discovered later.

Being able to beat deadlines into submission is also useful for when you are doing something yourself. Because you are very prepared once the inspiration strikes. I'd been writing much of this book in my mind for *decades*, so it only took about two months to actually put it on paper. Took about a month more to edit, do the layout, and publish. That was a short flurry of important time, and I couldn't have done it without my previous book writing experiences, both working for myself and for others.

With my first book, I'd been writing it for a decade in my mind, but I didn't have the skills to write well, especially something of book length. So I had to learn to do it all, slowly, as I was writing it. That book took six years to write, and wasn't nearly as good as this book is.

BE FLEXIBLE
Understand the dynamics of the people or organization you're working with, and *be able to adapt*.

I may often be critical of Microsoft, but I do like the fact that anyone at all who works there can go into Bill Gates' office with a good idea, without an appointment.

I told that to my friend who's a government economist, and he said, "If I wanted to have a sit down with even *my boss's boss*, it would seem really out of the ordinary. People in my office would be concerned. It would require paperwork and several weeks' notice, and there would have to be other people in the room when I met with him."

(Do you think this may be part of why the economy is screwed up?)

Some organizations and projects have a work (non-)hierarchy that is free and easy, where you can talk to anyone at any time about anything. Others are very high-protocol, like my economist friend mentioned above. Most projects and jobs are somewhere in between.

While it can be frustrating to you, a light-on-your-feet *work ninja*, to have to deal with corporate go-betweens in your interactions within a company or project, you have to be *willing to do so* sometimes.

Learn to quickly grok the structure of each organization or group you work with, and *adapt to their rules*, rather than trying to impose your own. If you don't like their methodologies, work toward *starting your own* organizations. (More on that in Chapter Sixteen, "Organization Building.")

The real professional *work ninja* effect comes into play when you're working on two or more projects concurrently, and can seamlessly jump between the team protocol requirements of one to the team protocol requirements of the other, back and forth, many times a day. And be able to do this with each e-mail, phone call, or face-to-face meeting, without making people upset, and without feeling like you're going crazy yourself!

I do this, all the time.

DO GREAT WORK, *ALWAYS*
Maintain a high level of professionalism. Do this whether you're designing a logo for a friend's blog as a favor, or directing a multi-million-dollar-budget film…whether you're helping your neighbor build a backyard barbeque pit, or supervising the construction of that skyscraper.

Because the truth is, if you don't behave as a pro in the former, you're unlikely to ever get asked to do the latter.

ACTION:

- **Work smarter!**

So, let's work on maximizing your work potential more with Chapter Fourteen, "Time Management for Calm and Profit."

Chapter 14 – Time Management for Calm and Profit

In this chapter, I'm going to give you some more of my patented work philosophy – some "punk rock cheerleading." Then we'll get down to business with some serious step-by-step time-management ideas (including *The Dean One-Page Plan*). You *could* skip the theory part and go straight to The Plan, but by now you know how I work, so you know I think it's *all equally important*. Besides, I'll also make sure it's all *fun*.

WINNERS AREN'T OUT IN THE BARS
Don't waste time. If you really want to make a living doing what you love to do, you probably shouldn't fritter away time on the emptiness of crowds.

I don't go to parties. I don't "network." The people who really *change the world* aren't out at a bar on Saturday night. They're in their room, changing the world. In fact, in six years of making films in Hollywood, while everyone else was out trying to network, I avoided that and worked. Most of the "networkers" I met along the way have given up by now and moved back east (or north, or wherever).

In my time in Los Angeles, I've only worked with one famous person, and he's a huge movie star. I met him in the recording studio - when he was reading the narration I wrote for a documentary film I directed.

THE RIVER OF LIFE
I see life, work, play and love as integral parts of the same whole. I don't see work as something I do Monday through Friday, and fun as something to do on the weekends. I *used* to live that life, but at some point I made a decision to work toward doing what I love, and now I'm *doing it*.

It's 5:51 in the morning, I'm working, and there's nothing I'd rather be doing in the whole world. Much of me feeling like this came from learning to manage my time and my priorities.

I see life as a *river* flowing in front of me. I even envision that while typing. I see my desk and my computer as a left-to-right flow of information. Some of the

information comes from inside my head. Some comes from elsewhere, from incoming e-mails. Some comes from beyond, from the universe.

My job on planet Earth is to kiss my wife, pet my cats, put *this sentence in this book*, answer that e-mail, know what needs to be done without a boss telling me, create new ideas and new ways of expressing them, and help keep the river flowing, and do so *without drowning in it*. It's a fancy dance, and I dig it. And a lot of doing it successfully has to do with managing my time.

> "Michael Dean laughs at deadlines. …Finishing a book eleven days ahead of schedule, good gawd y'all…."
>
> --Steve Weiss, Executive Editor, O'Reilly Media

> "Michael has the work ethic of a Kansas farmer, the brain of a Harvard professor, and the niceness of June Cleaver. And he beats deadlines into mincemeat! I've worked with hundreds of authors, and Michael is in my all-time favorite top-five list of people I love to work with."
>
> --Sandy Doell, editor on three of Michael's books, at two different companies

I didn't used to be like this, the way these editors say I am now. In fact, I used to be quite the opposite. It took a lot of work to become efficient, and the first thing I had to do was cut out the deadwood in my life. Then I had to learn to do the most with the little flash of time we are allotted on this planet.

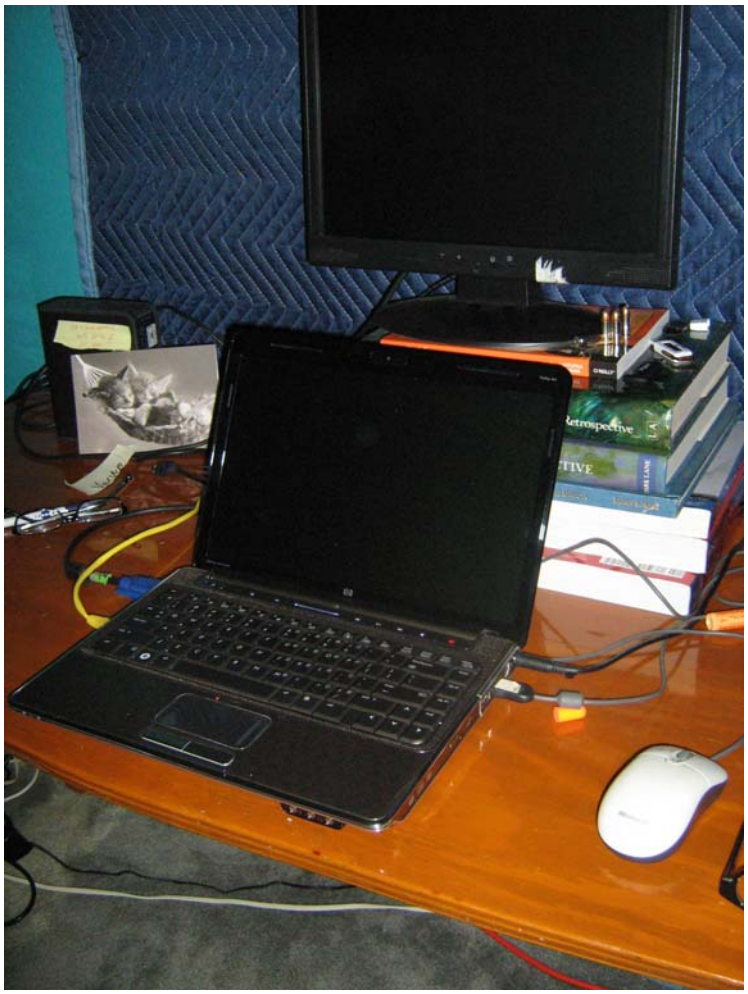

Figure 14.1
I see a river. Do you?

GOAL MANAGEMENT

A lot of the reason I try to minimize weenies in my life is so I can *have* a life. I work hard to manage goals, eliminate toxic people and patterns to *streamline my life*. And to me, that means doing important work. I *live* for work. Which really is a major coup in life: to love what you do, and even get paid for it. I've worked for decades to *be able* to do that, now I do it. I cannot let the universe down. I have to utilize the gifts I've been given, to the maximum extent possible.

LIFE IS A SERIES OF SMALL GOALS, NOT AN "EVENT."

Each film I make, each podcast I do, each book I write, each chapter of each book, each section, paragraph, every *word* I write, and whether that word is in italics, bold or has no special formatting…*all of this*, every *bit* of it is that much closer to

me one day leaving this world with serenity and a significant legacy. For me, today, it's all about living in the moment with an eye for tomorrow. That takes some planning, but it also takes change-on-a-dime flexibility.

And it also takes *not counting on specific results*. You can have *goals* without *counting on specific results*. Because specific results are impossible to enforce, so if you count on them, you will usually end up disappointed. Now I just make my work and put it out in the world as best I can, and the world usually digs it and pays me for it. Other times the world barely notices, and that's OK too. Because I'm *spared*.

When I was in rock bands, and doing drugs, I always lived for tomorrow, even as I thought I was living for the moment. I was manic a lot, but wasn't really that *happy*. I was always anticipating being happy when I "got that gig", "got that girl", "got that record deal", etc. I even wrote some really good songs that reflected this. I used to sing, "Maybe I'll be happy when I get there, maybe I'll be happy when I leave here. Maybe I'll be happy if you love me. Maybe I'll be happy when we're finally done…."

www.hitsofacid.com/HATT/BOMB_LucyInTheSkyWithDesi.mp3

I'm pretty happy these days. And part of it is a sort of Zen-like ongoing realization that "this is as good as it gets." And that's a *good* thing. The riches might not be up in heaven, so you gotta "be here now." *These* are the good old days, and the sooner you get used to it, by gum, the happier we'll all be.

Living for tomorrow didn't work. Even when my band got signed to a major label, it didn't "fix" me. I was still *me*. And I ended up *more* miserable, because those bigger expectations weren't met.

Being successful is not a single large event. Success is *a lifetime of tiny triumphs* and *small events*. Looking at it any other way is disastrous. Always remember, **expectations are appointments with resentments.**

MAKING YOUR OWN TIME

When I'm not writing on a schedule for pay (like I did with the YouTube book), but rather doing something I really love, and working on the project for me, on *my* schedule (like with this book), I pretty much only work when I'm manic.

I'm not manic-depressed, I'm manic-cranky. I'll often go to sleep as others are waking up to dawn's surly light. I'll go four or five days of sleeping only about four hours a night and working intensely in a manic phase, then sleep eight or nine hours a night and mostly watch TV and surf the Web. This is what my body

seems to like to do. But it was hard to do while having a day job, which is one reason I worked long and hard toward not having one.

> If you can believe this, *I only found out recently* what manic-depressive means. It does not always indicate someone who is *depressed*. The "depressive" in "manic-depressive" refers to *energy level*, not mental outlook. So I guess I *am* manic-depressive. But I'm no longer manic-*depressed*.

I work a lot. But I can even spend eight hours falling down link holes on Wikipedia and call it work. Because sometimes what seems like "play" rather than "work" actually *is* useful. You never know what random thought or idea will inspire something great later. That is the nature of working as an artist. And it works outside of art, too, if you let it. (Remember that guy with his feet up watching the birds out the window.)

Often in the sleepy phase, I'll take a lot of notes that I'll expand on later in the current project(s) when I'm back to the manic phase. Something I see on TV or in the newspaper (or out my window) will remind me of something that I saw, did, thought or felt years ago, and I'll make a note to put that idea into the new project. It all works out great.

Other than constant PESD, the thing that really keeps me from being depressed is the LifeAmp Work Plan. Back when I didn't have a lot of projects going on, or even when I did, but didn't have the methodology worked out to manage my time on each project, I used to get depressed. A lot. But that was years ago.

DON'T REST ON YOUR PAST
Living mostly in the past is just as disastrous as living mostly in the future.

One of my favorite lines in *The Sopranos* was Tony angrily (and correctly) saying, "'*Remember when*?' is the lowest form of conversation."

It's true. It is the lowest form of conversation. (Well, except maybe forwarded political spam, *regardless* of which party or candidate it's for.)

People who spend their time living in the past aren't really living at all.

I've got nine published books under my belt. Or is it ten? I can't even remember how many; I'd have to sit down and count. And at this point, if I knew without counting, I'd be resting on my laurels. The first book was published in 2000. So I've done more than one book a year for nine years, in addition to making two films in that time, doing hundreds of episodes of five ongoing podcasts, traveling

the US and Europe showing films, lecturing, teaching…and I can't even remember what else. I don't even *count* the four blogs I've updated and maintained, that's just spillover – my auxiliary external memory dump. So I *know* this new book will get finished, and I know it will happen quickly, and be great.

You have to *make your own time*. I did the work to become a successful author and filmmaker while working day jobs for nearly a decade. I'd work eight hours in an office, then come home and work six or eight hours on writing. Sometimes when I couldn't find temp work in offices, I'd dig ditches. Before offices, I was a bike messenger. It was all hard work that I would always rather have not been doing. But I did it because I had the goal of being my own boss. And it worked.

Figure 14.2
Start of my work day: photo I took in Belgium at dawn
while waiting for a train during a lecture tour

PREPARATION VS. PROCRASTINATION

Workers work. Writers write. I have a friend who says he's a writer. He's been writing a novel for ten years. He keeps moving back and forth between Los Angels and New York, looking for the right "inspiration." That is totally a "Maybe I'll be happy when I get there…" mindset. (Which again, is as useless as "remember when.") My friend has a drawer full of pages, but nothing completed

to really show, not even a full chapter to show me in his home, let alone to get out into the world. That's because he's obsessed with finding *the perfect place* to do his writing.

When I started writing this book, I decided I was going to install Linux (Puppy Linux to be precise) on my computer first. I needed a different "environment" to inspire me (sort of like moving from Los Angeles to New York, though Puppy is more like moving from Helsinki to the Australian outback). I spent a week messing around with Linux, and realized the learning curve was too much. I could do it, but not effortlessly, like with the stuff I usually use (Windows XP). Linux is more extensible, but I didn't currently have a *need* for more extensibility.

So to have my "new environment", I went out and bought a new, second laptop, a really fast one, which I devoted only to this book. I set up a second office in a spare bedroom, devoted only to this book. I decided to only put the programs on it that I need to do a book. I didn't set up an e-mail program, so I wouldn't be distracted. I didn't even hook it up to the Internet, except to set it up, and reconnected to the Net then when I was done writing and needed to add in the URLs and make the website for the book, and then publish and promote the book. But while writing the book, the laptop was a freestanding computer island, not connected to anything.

So…I spent several days tweaking Vista to not have the shiny flying windows that slow down performance and don't make me a better writer. I even spent a night finding the right *icons* for the very few programs on this computer. That may seem like a lot of work, like I'm obsessed with finding *the perfect place* to do my writing. But I spent *a few nights* on it. Not *ten years*. And a few months after starting, the book will be done and out in the world, changing lives. And making money. And I did this in the worst economy America has seen in 27 years.

Sometimes in life, you have to find the things that are good right off the shelf, then tweak them to where you want them. "Take what you need, and leave the rest." Just don't spend your life doing it.

(And when I finish promoting the book, I intend to get back into messing around with Puppy Linux again, at least until I figure out what my next project is. To me, mastering a new operating system counts as a *vacation*.)

PLANNING AND ORGANIZING IS PARAMOUNT

In preparation for starting this book, I spent a month amassing notes, outlines, pitches, e-mails I'd written to people, and such. I then had a folder on my desktop with 120,000 words of my writing. Probably 1/20 of that will make it into this book, the other 19/20 of the book will be written new. The approximate

target length for this book is 100,000 words, so I'd already written some of it. The job now was making it all coherent, in my own psychedelic original post-modern concentric parenthetical way, but without my flow style or unconventional ideas getting in the way of it sparkling in the readers' minds' eyes. (Ideas like putting so much in one book that any agent or publisher would say they were unrelated ideas.)

Everything that can be done has been done.
Being a great artist today simply consists of being a great editor.

COST OF TOOLS
It doesn't cost much money to spread your brilliance; the tools for creation, and for doing business, get cheaper and cheaper every year. And if you're great, you're diligent, *and* you're lucky, the world may just *pay* you to create and spread your thoughts. And most work these days is about thoughts, ideas, and the execution of same. The manufacturing, if any, can be outsourced.

The entry-level costs for changing the world from your room, and getting paid for it, are getting cheaper every day. I wrote my first book on a hand-me down used computer. I made both of my films without owning a camera, by motivating people who already owned cameras to help out. Debra Jean and I started our world-famous podcasts using an old laptop, a $300 microphone and freeware editing programs. We even boarded up a window to soundproof a room in our home to use exclusively for recording. Then sound *conditioned* it by spending some time and energy to cover the walls by nailing up clean free rug remnants we pulled out of a dumpster behind a carpet store.

RECOVERY *IS* AN ART
I should be dead many times over, yet somehow, I'm not dead. So I owe the universe a lot of art. *Daily* art.

I'm on a *mission*. And if you're reading this, you should be too.

(By the way, an anagram for "Michael Dean" is "Deal Machine.")

WHOEVER DIES WITH HIS ART ON THE MOST HARD DRIVES, WINS
(If the art is good, that is.)

I'm not going to give you the typical time-management cliché of doing the 8th grade math to tell you how many seconds you probably have left on this earth, and tell you "you need to maximize each second." I'm not going to tell you, I'm going to *show* you. Show you how it works in my life.

We're all going to die. But even though I'm healthy, and even if I think I might live to be 100 (my dad is 87 and pretty healthy), I'm stepping up my need to *give back and make a lasting mark*. So I'm going to put *every useful thing that I know* in one book, this book; *the book in your hands*. I'm gonna do at least this one more thing before I die. I'm going to say something heavy before I die, even if it's 50 years before I die.

People say some heavy stuff right before they die. That's probably why words uttered on someone's deathbed are legally admissible as testimony, even if there is only one witness. It's also why deathbed cantations are so often quoted, especially if they're ironic, funny or deep. The grammarian, Dominique Bouhours said, "I am about to -- or I am going to -- die: either expression is correct", then expired. Oscar Wilde said, "Either this wallpaper goes, or I do," and then died.

The last thing Hubert Selby Jr. wrote, a few days before he died, was this:

A list of indignities
1. birth
2. death

I don't personally see life that way, but then again, I didn't go through the physical pain that Selby did. And I sure do dig Selby's art. The guy could *write*. And he did so constantly. That man did not waste his time on planet Earth.

GREAT AND STEADY WINS THE RACE
Another thing to remember is that *some* constant work over a long time line beats working constantly to the point where you get burned out and abandon a project.

Conversely, something I heard a long time ago that I really like is "Trust the process." If your process is true, you can trust it to work.

> **The best ideas cannot be stolen, because the best ideas include *yourself* as an integral part of the formula.**

I usually plan, in a very general way, some of what I do up to about one year in advance. Most of my really set plans are set about one month in advance. I hate "pop ins" from visitors and do not tolerate them. Because I need to concentrate in order to "make it up as I go." While I do have things scribbled on my calendar for various days of the coming week, most of what I do on a given day is up to the whims of myself, and the universe. When you're self-employed, you need discipline. Most people, when not forced to work, *won't*.

TIME BUDGETING

Time Budgeting section adapted with permission from the publisher. Modified from the book, *YouTube: An Insider's Guide to Climbing the Charts*, ISBN 9780596521141 (O'Reilly, 2008).
Book by Michael W. Dean and Alan Lastufka.
Section by Michael W. Dean

HAVING A LIFE

Part of being an effective human being on the planet Earth is having enough time to reach all your goals elsewhere and also still "have a life."

Having enough time to do everything you need to do/everything you want to do, while still maintaining enough of a life to be happy is easy. *Simply don't sleep much.* Well, there other ways, but they involve a lot of budgeting your time…managing your time…basically, time management. Let's work on that instead of not sleeping.

If you strategically try for a mix of all the activities you'd like to pursue and find the proportion that works, you can have an online life, an offline life, a job, a romance, a hobby, and maybe even get more than five hours of sleep a night. It's hard, but it's doable. I'm doing it.

> I generally sleep *almost* enough, 6.5 or 7 hours a night. But in the final week or two of working on any large project, especially a book, I don't sleep much. Can't. I feel jet lagged. I feel like I'm waiting for my baby to be born. I sleep in shifts. Work five hours, sleep an hour. Work six hours, sleep two, etc., around the clock. Sometimes this can even add up to 8 hours in a 24-hour period, but is delightfully disorienting. It kinda feels like drugs.

I'm pretty much an expert at managing my own time, so I'll tell you what works for me. Everyone is different, but some of it will probably work for you.

FLEXIBILITY

A key element of time management is flexibility—the ability to get anything done from anywhere. I wrote much of my book *$30 Writing School* while riding the train around Germany and France with my Eurail pass, touring to lecture and show my film *D.I.Y. or DIE: How to Survive as an Independent Artist*. Most people would have looked at that as a vacation, but I look at all vacations as working vacations. In fact, while I've traveled more than most people I know, I rarely travel unless it's work-related. (This can possibly help with taxes, too.)

Living like this is not a deficit, and I don't consider it workaholism. I look at it as maximizing my potential and my time remaining on the planet Earth. It is also a function of the fact that I love the work I do and have structured my life to work toward succeeding in the goal of being able to do what I love for a living.

You need to be able to work from anywhere, any time. In fact, I'm writing this on my laptop in a doctor's office waiting room.

I even bring a pen with me everywhere I go and constantly make notes. The muse, that spark that creates creation, does not make appointments. The muse strikes anywhere and everywhere, and I have to be able to work from anywhere, any time. I often wake up in the middle of the night with an idea, scribble down a line or two of notes, and go back to bed. When I'm somewhere that I don't have paper, I scribble on the back of my hand.

EDITING

You also need to be able to edit on the fly. I take printouts of drafts of outlines for books, scripts, and treatments for videos with me whenever I leave the house. The advantages of printed pages are that they require no boot-up time, no Internet access, and no power. Printed pages are great for maximizing a few minutes of otherwise wasted time. Whereas I won't pull out my laptop unless I have at least ten minutes (two minutes to boot it up, seven minutes to work, and one minute to save and shut down), I'll pull out a page and edit it if I have just two minutes. I edit in the supermarket line, in elevators, and in line at the post office. When I used to take the bus, I'd edit while waiting for the bus, and edit *on* the bus.

It really helps me edit if I have something to shut out the chatter of the world. The whole world community with their small talk of small thoughts is not something I need in my head, especially in the form of random strangers bugging me when I'm in public places.

I often bring little foam earplugs in my pocket wherever I go. Or I'll use my iPod with some non-intrusive background music. (Instrumental music works best. It's hard to write or edit words on paper while hearing *words* in your ear.) And when I do that, I don't use little ear buds. I use big headphones (Sony MDR-7506). They cost about 100 bucks.
www.amazon.com/Sony-MDR7506-Professional-Diaphragm-Headphone/dp/B000AJIF4E/www30dollarfi-20

These headphones sound great and cut out about 90 percent of the ambient sound. They sound better than ear buds, shut out more, and keep people from

trying to talk to you. Nothing says "Leave me alone" like big padded headphones.

STEADY WORK BEATS FRANTIC WORK

Here's a little more on the thought we covered a few pages back. I'll say more about it, because it's so important.

Join a gym and any personal trainer will tell you this: Working out three days a week for the rest of your life will keep you in much better shape than working out six days a week for six months, getting burned out on it, and giving up. The same is true with any work, especially self-employment work. It's better to work steadily on things and make a habit of it until it's second nature than to work all day and night on something for a few months and then give up.

> Some days, a whole chapter pours out in one breath.
> Other days I can barely form a sentence.
> Being successful is more about the long time line than the moment.
> *Success is a culmination of moments*. Millions of moments.

I always have five to seven projects going at one time. It's usually one huge long-term (year-long) project, several shorter-term projects, and a couple of one-day projects. Managing them takes concentration. I have ADD (Attention-Deficit Disorder). Rather than being a professional victim and trying to get disability money or praise, I turned my ADD into a plus, through careful planning, note taking, practice, and the power of computers. (I also had to develop the Dean One-Page Plan, which helps immensely with overcoming time issues, ADD or no ADD. I'll talk more about "the Plan" and how it can help you in a minute.)

MULTITASKING

Effortlessly sliding between one thing and into another is easier for some people than others. I find that my ADD actually makes it *easy* to do this if I keep my mind and life clear of SVs, don't hold on to resentments that take up head space, plan my day/week/month and year in advance; and adjust and update my ongoing planning regularly.

Be careful. Multitasking is good if you're on a computer. It's not good if you're driving. For me, multitasking on the computer involves having five or six windows open at the same time in several programs and going back and forth from one to the other when I get bored or as e-mails come in. It works. If you're not used to it, it might seem overwhelming to you at first, but with practice and care, it enables me to do more in a given time period than if I'm doing one thing at a time.

Occasionally, I mess up and send the wrong e-mail to the wrong person or cut and paste the wrong signature line into the wrong e-mail, but the worst that can happen out of that is not a car crash but, rather, me confusing or irking someone.

BE ON A MISSION!
As I said, I wrote this entire section while waiting to see the doctor (back pain, from working on this book!). In that time, everyone around me read a few magazine articles and watched some TV. I wrote something meaningful that will be read by probably at least 100,000 people. Part of the reason I'm able to do that is because, overall, *I believe entirely in everything I do*. Sure, occasionally I have tiny doubts, but they do not stop me. I wake up every morning absolutely sure, beyond any doubt, that *today* I will change the world. And I do.

"Knowing I'm good" doesn't have to be egotistical. It's not me standing on my balcony, arms outstretched yelling to the masses, "Worship me, world!"

Likewise, it doesn't have to be melpy (self-pitying). It's not me looking in the mirror saying, "You're a good person, you're wonderful, I love you, Michael." (This silly stuff is well parodied by LisaNova in her very funny "Affirmation Girl" videos here:

> www.youtube.com/watch?v=e19NrkUcFEQ
> and here:
> www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1EIB1MNV8k

No, I don't give myself pats on the back and attaboys each morning. I don't need to. I'm too busy *hitting the ground running*. And each day I am absolutely sure that I am absolutely *on the right path*. Even though I evolve the path as I go.

It certainly makes time management easier if you're on a mission. If you *know* you have something valuable to contribute to the world, you can create this conviction in yourself. I've had it since I was a little kid, before I even had anything to *say*. But even then I knew I would do great things if I kept up the fortitude and moral compass to pull it off.

All the drugs, and too much drink were just a fifteen-year detour. And I even got a lot of stuff done then too, until it started *killing me*.

> NOTE: If you want to do everything for evil, rather than good, do not foster an "I am on a mission, and I will change the world" mentality. Go into sales instead. Sell soap and widgets and cars and fancy clothes to the washed masses. At least then you'll be relatively harmless.

> Remember, Adolf Hitler and Charlie Manson were both frustrated artists.
>
> Andrew Lobaczewski says in his book *Political Ponerology* that 6% of any population are psychopathic and 12% are highly likely to want to follow psychopaths.
>
> That's doesn't add up to a majority, but it's enough to skew things bad when most of the rest just "go along" eventually.

EFFECTIVE PLANNING

Several popular time management systems have been well marketed to consumers. I don't use any of them. They might work for you. But they all seem to me to be far too much like school, or something I would be *ordered* to use at an office job.

Some of these systems are sort of straightforward, like the 43 folders idea:

> http://wiki.43folders.com/index.php/Tickler_file

You set up 43 physical folders (one for each day of the current month and one for each month of the year). You put notes, plans, contracts, and such into each; and then check back regularly. But even then, there's a whole philosophy to the methodology of attacking tasks and goals, using a flowchart, changing your whole life around, and using a logic map to deal with things. And you're supposed to buy books to tell you how to do this.

Some of these systems, like that popular day-planner thing, seem almost cult-like to me. People I've met who are into a system like that are really *really* into it, and many of them have a religious fervor about it. That system not only involves buying a special calendar book and carrying it with you everywhere, but it also has a lot of books, software, carrying cases, and even weekend seminars associated with the system. It can cost a lot of money, and they have a chain of stores devoted to selling products for this one system.

Things like that are loved in the corporate world. In one chain of supermarkets my friend works for, you practically have to run your life with the system, at work *and beyond*, in order to work there.

As you can see, a lot of time management systems exist. Some cost money, some are complicated, and most seem to divide the world into two types of people: "those who use our great system, and the losers who don't."

What many of these systems have in common is this: The associated books, coaching, software, and seminars are making a lot of money for someone. And the systems can become time consuming in and of themselves. That doesn't seem like time management to me; it seems like time *manglement*: It mangles your time in order to try to *save* you time.

Thus, I would like to demonstrate to you my free, and much simpler, alternative. It's a time management system that makes me able to write many books, produce and direct videos, do podcasts, make a living at home, remember to buy cat food, and still have time for a life with my wife, and even get some sleep. I call it the Dean One-Page Plan.

THE DEAN ONE-PAGE PLAN
It's simple. It's free. And you can start doing it right *now*.

I organize my life with one one-page document per week. Every Thursday (you can start on any day you like), I print a page from a simple three-column, many-row template I've created. The three columns are labeled "DO," "BUY," and "CALL."

DO	BUY	CALL
Teach DJ MORE web admin and book admin. Inc. Lightning Source.	Charger for iPod	Michele, re: layout of images in YouTube book
Work on chapter 16 of tube book	iPod for wife	~~e-mail Woz with Interview request~~
~~Register chipped kitties~~	~~CD cases~~	~~Follow up on SPCA~~
CTH on BitTorrent	shotgun shells	Dad's birthday is Thursday
~~Edit PODIO book~~	~~Book mailers~~	
Record more for other podiobook	New coffee machine	George EARTH
Deposit book check	~~Pay PO box rental~~	
Order more copies of novel, send out orders	Get will notarized	Jez
vacuum & Back up	[redacted]	Lydia
	Upload new YouTube video ("50 things")	London

To blog:>

- Pod gear
- Euro trip 2005 pix
- "Home is where the rights are"
- Acre = 43,560 sq feet. Park by house is 7 acres
- "Simple Pleasures" eBook
- Tom Waits talks about Selby, Tom Waits / Nick Cave story

Figure 14.3
The Dean One-Page Plan in action

Here's how it works:

- Things in the "DO" column are things I need to do in the coming week.
- Things in the "BUY" column are things I need to buy in the coming week.
- People in the "CALL" column are people I need to contact in the coming week.

"DO," "BUY," and "CALL" seem to cover almost everything I need to think about in a given week, month, or year.

I include e-mail and "mail something to them" in the "CALL" column. You can change it to "Contact" instead of "CALL" if that makes more sense to you, but I like the one-syllable-each simplicity of the sound of "DO," "BUY," and "CALL." The bottom of the page has a section (in my example, it's called "To blog") for notes of stuff I don't need to get done this week that I want to carry on to the next week.

I keep the template for this document on my computer desktop. I print it out once a week (*twice* a week on a week with many small tasks) and scratch out items as I complete them. And I write things with a pen in the printed copy as they arise. At the end of a week, I print the list for the next week, removing items that have been completed, and adding more items to do.

It really works well to tame the river of life.

> You can download the free Dean One-Page Plan template here:
> http://www.stinkfight.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/deanonepageplan-template.doc

I deal with long-term goals by getting a calendar every December. I usually get one with kitty cats on it, but you can get one with whatever you feel like looking at for a year. *Make sure you get one with enough space* to write a few things for each day that you need to (like two inches on each size of the box). If you get as busy as you'd probably like to be, you'll *need* the room. I also write notes in the margin between the calendar itself and the photo at the top for tasks I need to do at some point during that month.

The Dean One-Page Plan could change your life and is worth more than the price of this book on its own.

> Note: The Dean One-Page Plan text covered by the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 license. My system is not patented or trademarked; it is in the public domain. Do what you like with it, and pass it on however you'd like; just keep the name "The Dean One-Page Plan" in the attribution, and link the website for this book:
> www.lifeamp.org

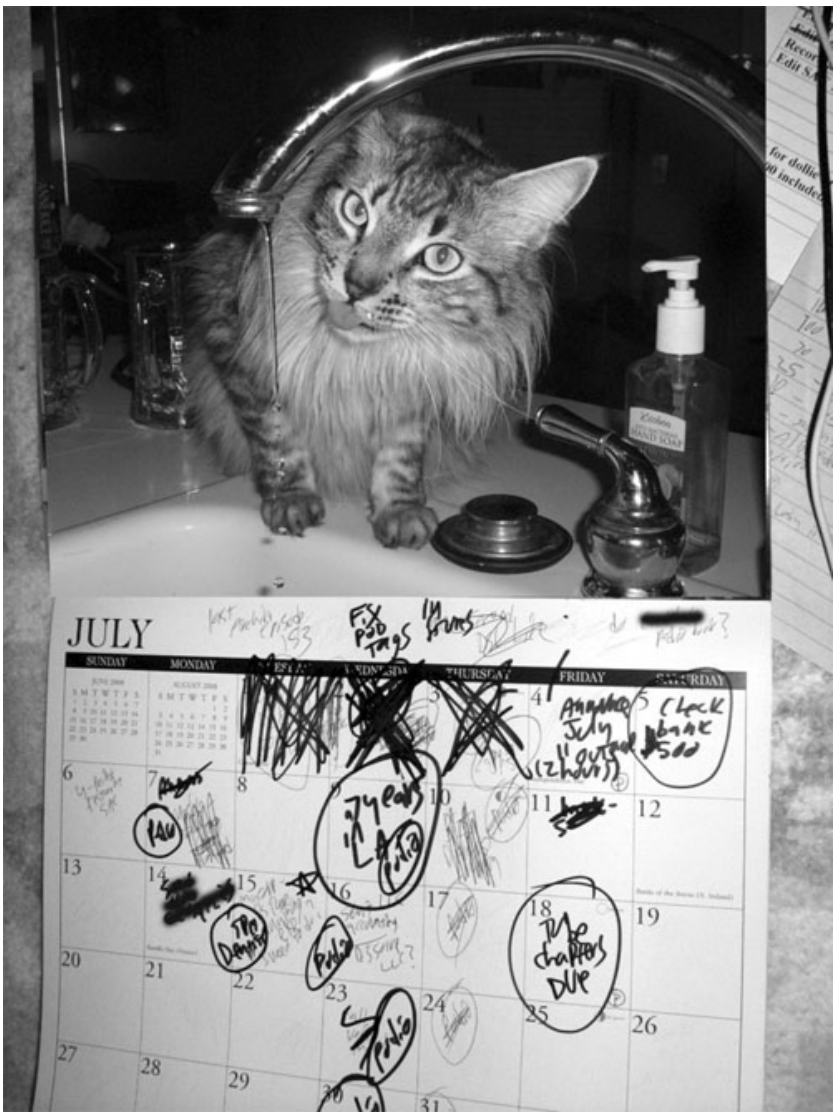

Figure 14.4
The Dean One-Page Plan auxiliary calendar system

MULTI-PURPOSING

I take a lot of care with writing e-mails. Sure, I do them lightning fast, but I also *think* lightning fast. I stop to read e-mails to myself out loud in my head to see whether they need any tweaking before I hit *send*. I am careful with all e-mails, whether it's trying to get a contract job that will finance all of the Nestlandia Institute's operational expenses for a year or if it's simply a short "thank you" reply to a fan letter. In fact, I'm so careful writing e-mails that they're often so good that I want to use them elsewhere.

I feel it's my right to use my side of any e-mail I write, because it's *mine*. I never publish the other person's comments without permission, and I never use anything of mine that is specific to any one person, but if I write something to someone else, it's my property to reuse, without needing to ask that person. By doing this I can often "kill two birds with one stone" in a way that is very effective time management. (One of the many reasons I don't like to post on social networking sites is that their terms of service usually dictate that *they own* anything posted there.)

LEARN TO TYPE. FAST.
It goes without saying, but typing is basically the main way that information gets input into the matrix of the world these days. All business involves writing. Most art begins with writing. And dealing with problems as they arise is usually done via typing these days. I took a typing class when I was 14. Back then, it was on *typewriters*.

I didn't learn much then, because I didn't practice. I was the only guy in the class, and I was too busy staring at the older girls to work.

I took another typing class, when I was older, and "got it." Everyone else in that class was doing it because they wanted to be a secretary. I did it because I wanted to be a writer, wanted to change the world, and knew I couldn't do that hunting and pecking.

I type 110 words a minute. With great accuracy. And I am really quick with using a mouse and doing keyboard shortcuts to open, save, edit, and close documents. I'll spit out 1,000 words before breakfast—seriously—and they're usually pretty darned good.

You don't need to type 110 words a minute to change the world, but you probably need to be able to accurately type at least 40 or 50 words a minute to keep up with the entry-level amount of work you're going to need to do in order to really make a mark on the world.

INTERNET ADDICTION
I've heard a lot of talk about Internet addiction, basically starting about a year after the Web existed.

Two of my computers are turned on about 18 hours a day (from the moment I wake up until the moment I go to sleep), although I'm not on them all that time. I get up and do other stuff, nap, take walks, take and make phone calls. I'm on computers a lot of that time, though, probably 10 hours per day, 360 days a year.

I actually have a third computer on in another room that runs 24/7, but it's acting as a server, putting info out into the world. Because it's *always* time for *someone* to download, somewhere in the world. It's like having a worldwide radio station in my home.

I might be considered an Internet addict by some, because if I get up in the middle of the night and go to the bathroom, I'll often go into that room and check my e-mail before I go back to sleep, although usually only if I'm expecting a crucial work-related e-mail. I do business with people in Europe and Australia a lot. Their e-mails often come in the middle of the night and sometimes require a quick response if we're busy on a current project.

> NOTE: Again, you don't have to answer *every* e-mail immediately. I usually answer all e-mails promptly. As with amends, make them *promptly*, not *immediately*. That doesn't mean *this minute*; for me it usually means within a day. (And "promptly" also doesn't mean "put it in a folder and forget about it for good." I've even seen one specious "time-management program" that basically told you to delete all your unread e-mails frequently. That's disrespectful. To the world. I don't feel obligated to answer every e-mail, but I don't delete them unanswered in bulk.)
>
> For less-prompt e-mail replies, I've created an e-mail folder called "Answer Later," and I put e-mails in that category into the folder. I go through the folder once a week or so and see which one is "ripe" enough to need to answer. To be honest, I do this most often with fan mail, especially if it's very long and overly glowing and the person wants to really *know* me, like beyond knowing me from my work, but want to know *me*, and I don't know that I'll want to know *them*.
>
> If an e-mail is from someone I know well and I'm doing ongoing exchanges with, like when Alan and I were writing the YouTube book, I'll often answer almost immediately, because it's more of a conversation than a letter.

I've been accused of having Internet addiction. But I don't think I do. (Then again, many drug addicts don't believe they're drug addicts.) The reason I don't think I am an Internet addict is because it doesn't interfere with other aspects of my life. And because I use the Internet to get things *done*.

This may be a personal bias, but I think gaming online 18 hours a day is a waste of time. For that matter, I think being on YouTube 18 hours a day might be a

waste of time, because you don't have a lot to show for it in the long run. With the games, I guess you do produce *something*. You produce a high score if you're good, and maybe gain the respect of other gamers. And on YouTube, you make people laugh or think, and maybe make a little money, but it's entirely dependent on a system that could disappear at any time. Any day of your YouTube life you could turn on the computer in the morning and find that the site has been sold and is a different animal now. Or you could find it completely gone, forever.

Hell, even though I love computers, I may be old fashioned, in a way. I like *books*. Write a book if you can. Use YouTube (and the rest of the Internet, particularly Wikipedia) as a self-administered university to get smart and skilled and knowledgeable enough to write some books. (I recommend my book *$30 Writing School* if you want to know how to actually get one published.)

Books are very archaic technology. They're stories smashed into ground-up pieces of dead trees. But books are one of the few common art forms these days that would exist if the Internet—nay, the entire power grid—went black. If *civilization failed*, you could still read a book by the light of the sun (or even by a full moon) and get as much out of it as you could in a fully functioning technologically advanced society. Hell, the Dean One-Page Plan could help you *rebuild* society, and that's in a book. You don't need a computer or even a pen to use that system. The three-column Dean One-Page Plan will work with a sharpened stick and dirt.

> NOTE: If you do find yourself rebuilding society in a post-thermonuclear war scenario, you might have to change the second column from "BUY" to "Barter," and the third column from "CALL" to "Visit." (Or perhaps change the third column to "Annihilate with rocks and sticks" if history repeats itself, even in our last chance to start over. And I think history probably would.)

BACKING UP

Back up your work frequently. Nothing is less effective for time management than doing hours (or years) of work and losing it into the air. Computers crash. Files become corrupted. Hard drives fail. And in my 17 years of daily computer use, I will tell you from experience: It's not a matter of if; it's a matter of *when*.

I save documents as I go. I turn off autosave in the properties of any program I work frequently with, and save manually every few minutes, using the Ctrl+S keyboard command. Autosave can be obtrusive. It just gets in the way of my flow, because I have to wait a few seconds for the autosave to complete before I

can type anything else. But you probably shouldn't turn off autosave unless you're going to be fairly obsessive about saving manually. Like me.

I'll save even more frequently than every few minutes if I'm on a roll. If I type a particularly brilliant sentence, I'll save. If I make a really cool edit in my video-editing program, I'll save. It becomes second nature to do this if you work at it. Train yourself to *save as you go*.

I'll back up a text document as soon as I'm done working on it for that particular session. I always encrypt them (using TrueCrypt). Then I'll either back it up to a USB thumb drive (that I carry with me everywhere, on my key ring) or I'll e-mail it to myself at a free Gmail account that I use only for backups. With larger files, I back them up to a removable hard drive at the end of a bit of work, and once a week I back up everything to a 500 GB encrypted FireWire drive. It seems like a lot of work, it seems a little obsessive-compulsive, but in my computing history, in the literally millions of files I've created and edited, I've lost only one, and it wasn't a very important one. (It was the list of women I've slept with. The ones who don't want to kill me in my sleep are still my friends, so I certainly don't need a list.)

Be sure you have good antivirus software with up-to-date virus profiles. And run scans once a week. I generally make Thursday afternoon my day to scan and then back everything up on all three of my computers. It takes a bit of work, but from a time management standpoint, there's no substitute for this kind of care. If your life exists largely on computers, it's good to keep your computers happy, humming, and the information on them duplicated and stored elsewhere. (Especially offsite, in case your computer is stolen, dies, or your house burns down. I think about this option, because I live in Southern California, where there is an annual wildfire *season*.)

I like to get everything done on the same day so I can start fresh the next day. Thursday is also my day to blow my computers clean with canned air, vacuum out the fans in my server computer, and even vacuum the house, as well as print out my new Dean One-Page Plan page. Thursday feels like Sunday to me, the day before the beginning of my week. I don't know why, but that's the way my internal clock works.

KEEP ON TIME-MANAGING ON

I hope some of this gave you some ideas and inspiration, so you'll figure out your own day, and do it your own way. I truly believe that some sort of time management system is needed to do the amazing amounts of steady work that are required to make a dent in the world these days.

(End of adapted section)

ACTION:

- **Write down what you'd like to do for a living if you could do anything. Then do some brainstorming, in writing, on what it would take to get there. (You've had this assignment before, but this time you have more information to work with.)**
- **Print out the Dean One-Page Plan, hang it on your wall, and *use it*.**
- **Tell two friends about The Plan.**

Now that you've learned how to manage your new-found time, let's put it to work in the next chapter where we'll learn to *Make a Living Doing What You Love*….

Chapter 15 - Make a Living Doing What You Love

MAKING A LIVING DOING SOMETHING YOU *WANT* TO DO
This chapter describes how I came to make a living doing what I love. For me, that's art: writing, film, music. But even if you're not an artist, and not trying to be an artist, read this chapter anyway. You'll be able to apply it to your own productive work life.

Here I'll teach you how to love, rather than dread, waking up each day. It's all about making your mark without stepping on toes, now that you know how to keep the toes of others off yours.

GOD
It takes real desire, dedication and devotion to be your own boss. And for me, it helps to be a human being having a spiritual experience.

When I say "spiritual experience", I'm not saying it has to be the "blinding white light, hand of God" variety. I've only had two of those. One was when I was six years old. The other was a few years ago, during a car accident.

I'm talking more of the ongoing "educational variety" of spiritual experience whereby you commit, one day at a time, to seeking and improving yourself, and interacting with people who have a positive manner about them. I feel God's presence in my life most often in the interactions I have with my fellow man. And woman.

By "have a positive manner" I don't mean they speak softly and constantly smile. One of the most codependent and sick people I know speaks softly and constantly smiles. He's a serenity vampire and I try to do what I can to minimize him in my life. Unfortunately, I'm forced by circumstance to have occasional dealings with him.

I do know soft-spoken good people, but most of the good *spiritual* people I like tend to be a little more lively, not glum, yet humble, and do not smile constantly. I do not smile constantly.

WORRY
I have a few moments a month of unfounded worry. But less than I used to, more than I one day will. Life's a moving target, a non-linear journey. Not a straight line to a single set goal point. To me, life is a psychedelic, hypertextual, concentrically parenthetical, spiritual experience.

Even though life's a moving-target journey, *having goals* helps. Work toward reasonable goals; one large goal, and several smaller goals, at a time.

However, *do not be tethered to those goals as absolutes*. Modify as needed, as you learn and grow. Adjustments in plans sometimes have to be made on the fly, in reaction to life doing what it wants to do. In response to the agendas of others. In reply to *chaos and statistics*.

Flick doubt and worry off of you. *Physically*. It's a good motion to reinforce the self-defense against doubt. (Best done alone, however, or people may think you're crazy.) As a friend told me, with time and practice on a right path, doubt will disappear and turn into "steely determination."

Quitting the day job was an important goal for me. Here's how I did that:

THE DEAN TEN-POINT PLAN
TO FREEDOM FROM THE LEASH OF TEDIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Here for your dancing and dining pleasure, and to save your mortal soul, are the ten consecrated (at least by me) points to make a living doing what you love:

1- QUIT YOUR DAY JOB.
I did.

You can do this immediately, or slowly, or semi-quickly. You could go in tomorrow and say, "Thank you, but I'm *done*."

I *don't* recommend doing it like that, like that song, "Take This Job and Shove It!" On the other hand, I don't recommend you plan for doing it many many years in the future, because then it won't happen.

I recommend quitting semi-quickly. Mark a date on your calendar, one to two years from now, and continuously plan for that date. If you don't own a multi-year calendar, get one and mark the date. Start Xing off days each night before you go to bed. Celebrate: "Yeah! Yay! Another day efficiently working toward my freedom!"

Then you can go to bed happy, *no matter what else happened that day*.

> I am gainfully and blissfully employed, but my wife and I are currently applying these techniques of our solid dream of living somewhere more rural and having some land as a buffer between us and the world.

You are now working toward the day that you'll give up your servitude and start full time on your majestic plan. The one-to-two years of head start will allow you to tie up loose ends, save a little nest egg/cushion, and even put in two or three weeks' notice at the end, just to be a nice person. But I recommend *not* planning your exodus past two years into the future, because in that amount of time you might change your mind. Or lose focus. Too far away doesn't feel real.

Don't tell your boss or coworkers of your plan. The "Hiya joes" *love* to have something juicy to tell around the water cooler.

And after you quit, keep Xing days off on the calendar, for the rest of your life. Not marking days until death, but rather marking days successfully completed in your new life. Every day a little goal achieved; every day a little victory won.

If you are nearing your goal date and you are not really ready, reassess and adjust to a new date, six months in the future. But don't do this too many times, or you'll never get there. Consider *not* waiting until you're totally comfortable enough to quit. Sometimes *not* being entirely comfortable is a good catalyst to really *work* your new plan.

Think of the pioneers. Did they go west expecting comfort? No, they went west in the face of discomfort and adversity to find a place to build a better life, and they succeeded.

2- WORK INSATIABLY AND DETERMINEDLY. Don't take holidays. If you love what you're doing, you'll just *do* it.

I'm amazed when I hear "writers" wanting to know what to do about "writer's block." It's a favorite subject on online "writers' forums", which is why I stay the hell off of writer's forums, except the very smart one for this book: www.lifeamp.org/forum/

What the hell *is* writer's block? I've never "had" it. ("Having writer's block" sounds like a disease, doesn't it? Maybe people could go on disability from having it, lol….)

There *is* no writer's block. If you are a writer, you *write*.

Worse yet are writers who are "*planning* to write." If you're a writer, you've already started, and you write regularly.

And you *edit*. That's as important, if not *more* important, than the writing. In any endeavor. Writing is basically planning. Editing is the real work. I always see people with their laptops in cafés writing. I never see people in cafés *editing*. That's why those people will only ever be in cafés.

Don't buy the "beatnik lie" that "the first draft is the only pure draft." Pugwash, I say!

Whatever you chose to do, if it's right for you, you'll just *do it*. *Insatiably and determinedly*. Whether it's writing, starting your own business, or creating a powerful movement that catches on worldwide. And you'll need to continually assess yourself to ensure you do it with a consistently high level of quality.

> Making a living doing something you love can take a long time. As professional author Jim Goad quipped (while writing his first book at night while working a day job to pay the bills), the reason there aren't many great working-class writers is that "the working class is too busy *working* to write."

3 - PURSUE THAT WHICH YOU LOVE, NOT A *CAREER* IN THAT WHICH YOU LOVE, AND YOU'LL HAVE A BETTER CHANCE AT A CAREER IN THAT WHICH YOU LOVE

I've never pursued a "career" at anything, even art. My ADD and dyslexia have kept me from doing things in a way that adds up to what most people call a "career." But I never really *wanted* a career. I like *work*, but not a career. "Having a career" implies that people have hard expectations that you will produce a particular type of output periodically. I don't like living under such predictable demands.

I prefer to be a jack of all trades, and a master of some.

When I finished making my first film, *D.I.Y. OR DIE: How To Survive as an Independent Artist*, it had a great buzz and a lot of people told me, "You should get on the ball and make another movie, *now*, to capitalize on the momentum." But I didn't feel like making a film at that point. I wrote four books in four years instead, *then* made another film. The only filmmaking I did in that four-year break was a very well-paid six week job editing a corporate video that was never seen outside of that corporation and did nothing to increase my "resume" as a *filmmaker*.

I do what I like, and I get paid in satisfaction. In addition, I often get paid in money. I work for myself, and report directly to the universe. But I do look after myself to ensure I get what I need.

4 - IF YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT WHAT YOU'RE DOING, DON'T TRY TO MARKET IT YET

Not everyone can be on the cutting edge. If everyone were a futurist, a visionary, a professional dreamer, garbage would pile high in the streets. If you're not cut out for changing the world, don't bother. *Someone's* gotta keep the electricity on.

Hobbies are nice to have. But dilettantes who think they're brilliant get in the way of real visionaries. Same thing is true with *budding* visionaries who think they're ready to have their work seen and sold, but aren't yet ready.

Inventions, treatises, CDs, manuscripts, screenplays and paintings by truly gifted people end up in slush piles sandwiched between all the hack crap. Dilettantes make it harder for genius to be heard. And the world needs more genius. And less crap.

Figure out early if you're good or not. But be cautious when listening to the *opinions* of others. Look objectively and frankly at the circumstance, and the source. Early on when he was playing in clubs, some people thought Jimi Hendrix sucked, because he didn't sound like whatever came before. Other people knew early on that Hendrix was great. *Hendrix* knew that Hendrix was great.

A lot of people always knew I was great, even as my high school English teachers were telling me, "You'll never be a writer because you can't spell." (This was before word processing and spellcheck.) Some people in Virginia told me my band Baby Opaque sucked, but the people saying that were beer-burping frat boys who liked cover bands and thought the Cars were "punk rock." Baby Opaque was amazing, but not to someone who wanted to hear a human jukebox ensemble churn out top-40 or by-the-numbers roadhouse blues, which is what clubs in Virginia usually featured back then.

5 - REMOVE ALL OBSTACLES.
As we've covered, get rid of the toxic people and toxic patterns that hold you down.

Once that's all done, the biggest obstacle to remove is your own *ego*. Quit trying to be a star. I learned well from Phil Sudo that the true artist is only in competition with *himself*.

Have self-esteem and have confidence in what you do. But transcend the ego, quit trying to become "famous", and you'll have a better chance of ending up famous. Work at your craft, not at the *idea* of being someone who does that craft. That is, don't worry about *looking the part*. Nothing could get in your way more. Work at *work*, not at the ideal of "*the working man*." (And *certainly not* at the ideal of being a "worker of the world.")

Conversely, while too much ego is a detriment, *some* attitude is usually needed to have the gumption to get people to notice you in the first place. As I said earlier, AA probably wouldn't have spread if the guy who started it wasn't an ego-driven maniac during his early sobriety. The key is being self-aware enough to know when something stops helping you and starts hurting you.

6 - STOP BEING A VICTIM. IN EVERYTHING.
As we've said, this is one of the biggest road blocks in life. But *especially* so in trying to do what you love for a living.

If you're staying up late trying to start your own company after working eight hours at your day job, and as a result you are sleepy at your day job, don't expect your boss to understand. He's not paying you to be brilliant all night on your own time. He's paying for your full attention on *his* time.

I get the job done, no matter what the job is, and no matter what it's paying (if anything) this week. It eventually pays, always. Usually money. Sometimes

"mailbox money" (ongoing royalties). But often much more than money. Sometimes it pays in changing the world, by creating a movement.

Don't be a "starving artist." It's OK to live lean while building your dream. But contrary to what movies tell you, living lean is not, in and of itself, noble. You don't deserve a medal for working extra hard. You're doing it for *you*. No one should be expected to give you preferential treatment for doing so.

Glorifying the *starving artist* image is embracing a *victim mentality*.

Don't be a victim about having to start *somewhere*. Powerful ideas can become a meme, (a spontaneously spread movement) and spread virally, in a huge way. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme

That's what happened with *D.I.Y. or DIE*. I made the film for people to *watch*, and apparently some people think it's a powerful film, and spread it far and wide by word of mouth. While I was producing the film, I never dreamed that seven years later I'd still be getting interviewed about it, flown out to show it and speak at colleges, or that it would be in film festivals without any effort from me. I'd say, "Well done, and then some."

You *can* change the world from your bedroom, but it's important to choose the tack you take.

Don't be a victim about making money! Selling your work is not "selling out." If you can still sleep at night, if your conscience rests easy, you're not a sell out.

I don't see working with corporations as "selling out." I *do* carefully pick and choose how, when, and with whom I work. And I'm very proactive and protective about how my work is advertised and presented. I still do a lot of projects with no corporations involved at all, some of it with essentially no income, just because I like to make stuff. Like my personal podcasts.

Work isn't always for money, but you need to know that it's *OK to make money*. And it's OK to be treated like a star for your work, if you understand that the work is the star, not you. That way, you're a champion for your work, you stay more humble, but you still get to go along for the ride.

7 - WHEN YOU CAN'T REMOVE AN OBSTACLE OR ROUTE AROUND IT, *TURN IT INTO A WIN*.
I started the $30 Film School from a resentment. I couldn't get a job I wanted because I didn't have a college diploma. I got mad. With time, I got philosophical about it. I did a lot of thinking about the value of a "proper education" versus

simply knowing your subject. So I decided to start my own school. In the form of a book.

See? A resentment and a laptop. That's all you need to be great, if you can turn your resentment into a plus for yourself.

I get a lot of praise for valuing *meritocracy* over valuing a piece of paper bestowed from some ivy-covered institute. I also get a bit of hate mail. I used to respond to the hate mail, and sometimes also post it online. Now I ignore it, block them, and just keep a copy in case it turns physically or legally ugly and I need a record of what happened before. It rarely does, and I'm not afraid of that anymore. I protect myself, in every sense of the word.

If you live your life in a way that doesn't hurt others, you're fine. If you live your life in a way that doesn't hurt others but also *draws attention to yourself and your work*, you're going to have some weenies accosting you (at least on the Internet), semi-regularly, for the rest of your life.

In addition to the snitty e-mails I get from strangers and former friends, the user reviews on Amazon of my books *$30 Film School, $30 Music School* and *$30 Writing School*, and my film *D.I.Y. or DIE* are also divided. But it's OK. I figure if I'm getting such a black & white range of reactions (with very little middle ground), I must be doing something right.

I'm *not* a starving artist. And I didn't think of myself as one even back when I was living lean.

These days I do OK. Mostly by just constantly and obsessively working on projects all the time. Debra Jean and I are starting work on her second book (her writing, me editing; we trade roles when I write a book). We've built a little recording studio in our home. It's called ¡Casa de Llama! Studio. We do the podcasts there, I record my music, and we've been doing some paid voiceover work.
www.debrajeandean.com
www.michaeldeanvoice.com

I'm trying to work toward getting her employed at home so she can quit her day job, so we can hang out all the time. That's one of my goals. One of *our* goals.

I've always wanted a gal I could create with, not get in fights with, and have our collaborations and the collaborative process *rock*. I dreamed it, I searched the world, and I found her. And I married her.

> A fun anecdote: The octogenarian retired judge who performed our wedding ceremony at the courthouse was awesome. We now fondly refer to him as "Commissioner Yoda", because he kinda looked and sounded like the wise Jedi. And his official title was "Commissioner."
>
> After the "I dos", he made a very odd speech to me. He said, "I want to congratulate the groom. Now wonder you may, 'Why congratulating the groom am I, and not the bride? You met this woman, you fell in love. You schemed and plotted to get her into your life. Now marrying you she is. So congratulating you am I."
>
> We thought it was funny, and totally dug him.
>
> Commissioner Yoda's comment might have shocked some couples, but he knew how to play to his audience. I think he figured it was OK to say this to the happy couple when the groom was dressed in sneakers, an anarchy T-shirt and a skater hoodie jacket. I also think Commissioner Yoda understands good work; he may be retired, but he's *still doing what he obviously loves*.

When I got married, a lot of my friends were shocked. If there had been a yearbook of 1980s punk rock 'n' roll in Frisko, I think I would have been voted "Most likely to die single." (Or simply, "Most likely to die.")

8 - STAY OFF OF MYSPACE AND FACEBOOK
(As with the rest of this book, everything in this section is my *opinion*.)

These sites are huge time wasters. These sites won't help you. Nor will any sites like them. They'll only help you make money for the sites' stockholders. MySpace and Facebook are just a bunch of kids (of any age) pretending to have friends to help their low esteem. (And don't get me started on *Twitter*. Why would I want to know what some stranger had for lunch today?)

> SOCIAL NETWORKING PROVIDES WEBSITES FOR PEOPLE WHO SHOULDN'T BE ANYWHERE *NEAR* A COMPUTER.

MySpace "friends" aren't real friends at all. A real *friend* will bail you out of jail. I wouldn't count on most MySpace friends to even read a bulletin. MySpace is a bunch of spammers spamming each other without reading anyone else's spam. It's all content creators and no content consumers. And most of the content is horrible. It only exists to display ads. NewsCorp's number-cruncher weenies

finally figured out that kids weren't watching TV anymore, so they bought MySpace and made it *look* like TV.

Beware of trusting "all your eggs in one basket" with sites like MySpace and YouTube. Pay for some server space elsewhere. Server space has become very cheap.

Back in 1998, I spent many months building and promoting my music profile on MP3.com. I had stickers printed, put my MP3.com URL on CDs, books, T-shirts and elsewhere. The next year MP3.com went to a "pay for play" model. They deleted everyone's site overnight, went offline for months, then tried to *charge me money to restore my page*. I vowed "never again."

> I host with, and recommend, DreamHost.
> www.DreamHost.com
>
> If you enter the code **DEAN** when you sign up, you'll save some money and I'll get some free hosting time. Register your own domain and build that up instead of wasting time and energy on someone else's "social networking" site. I don't use DreamHost for e-mail, but for mass hosting of large numbers of huge files on a site getting lots of hits, they're the best deal around. (DreamHost handles domain registrations too, and they've been around for ten years, which is old school in Internet time, so they're not likely to go away.)

9 - FIND PEOPLE WHO ONLY CARE ABOUT MONEY, AND PUT THEM IN CHARGE OF SELLING YOUR WORK, SO YOU CAN STAY FOCUSED ON THE *WORK*.

Most advertising is basically highly trained people picking pockets by remote control…with the consent of the pocket owners.

And the things most people think are important make me laugh. Some of the worst ads are those for diamond rings (big on MySpace, as well as on TV). The ads make it look like you'll die cold and lonely if you don't spend four month's salary on a shiny, sparkly lump of dead, cold carbon.

> One of the many reasons I dig my wife is she agrees with me that diamond rings, and the need for people to buy them to prove love, are silly. I did give her a wedding ring, but it's a tiny diamond that belonged to my mother. The sentimentality is what's important to her. She says it makes her feel my mother approves. I'm pretty sure my mother *would* approve.

> I don't like to wear anything on my hands, gets in the way when I type, so I didn't want Debra Jean to buy me a ring. She bought me some really nice microphones instead, and I bought her more computer memory. I gave her a beautiful rifle on our second anniversary.

Advertising experts are *amazing* at what they do. They *sell*, and do it very well.

Once you've grown your company or mission to the point that the selling and disseminating is getting in the way of the creating, try to outsource the marketing to pros. (Just don't listen to anything they say that isn't about money. They'll be wrong.)

There is no longer any need to beg a big corporation to bless you by handling you end to end in the design, creation and selling of your product or service. Start in your garage, and make it great. Then hire companies who can mass produce your design and hire marketing wizards to sell it. (You'll keep more of the money that way, too.)

Marketing gurus don't even have to like what they're *selling*, and that's OK. That's their art. They know how to sell *anything*, whether it's Bibles or bug spray, food or porn, Republican candidate or Democrat candidate.

10 - YOU *CANNOT FAIL*

If you're doing what you love, even if you don't make lots of money, you are succeeding. Any doubter who tells you otherwise is a blank food tube, a philistine who exists only to be marketed to (or to do the marketing). Anyone who tells you you're failing will subsist on a diet of fried cheese and reality TV until they die of clogged arteries and a clogged soul. You are not even the same *species* as these doubters, so you should feel free to ignore them.

And even if you *do* measure "success" in "money" or "units shipped" (which is all fine and dandy), or even just "Web page views", and you think you *are failing* because your work's not getting consumed by enough souls, learn to "do what you love to failure" as a means of strengthening your plan.

In physical exercise people often "exercise to failure", meaning "do pushups and sit-ups until you cannot do any more, until you collapse trying the next one." This builds strength proteins in your muscles later while you sleep.

If you take this tack with anything, even when you "fail", you are becoming *stronger* at what you do. Exorcise your demons by *exercising* your demons. Take

them out for a walk and work 'em to failure. If you do this, your demons *don't* rebuild overnight. They die a little more each time you work toward your goals.

What ever doesn't kill you sometimes *does* makes you stronger. Mew!

> **So. That's The Dean Ten-Point Plan. Now here's a little fine tuning and further festive encouragement:**

PUBLISH OR PERISH! D.I.Y. OR DIE! MAKE A MARK!
Think about the thousands of years people have been accomplishing things. Then think about the fact that in well less than one century you will be dust in the ground. Your riches may be in heaven, but your legacy, other than offspring, is only your output, only your *work*, once you've gone "dust to dust."

Do you want to pass as a blip on the screen of history, leaving nothing? Be an oil stain on the driveway of life?

Of course not. So quit workin' for "the Man", and start being your own boss at whatever it is that you think you should be doing. Start your own business. Make art. Fix cars. Or both. Repair and sell rifles. Do homeschooling. Make wine. *Invent* something.

But no matter what you do, *make your business your art*.

You might starve to death. *But then again you might not*. And if you don't quit your job and light out on your own, you will never know.

> Humans are not only one of the only species that has sex for pleasure, we are the *only* species that makes art, creates complex machines, and conducts trade.

HOW IT WORKS IN NESTLANDIA
It is Saturday night. My wife and I have no desire to leave the house and go out partying. We'd rather stay in and change the world from our home.

We stand in our mood-lit soundproofed home sound studio. Year-round Christmas tree lights illuminate the room. I press "record" on the computer interface. My wife and I are cheek to cheek as we speak through the pop filter into the luxuriously decadent and expensive condenser microphone. We speak. We riff. We have fun.

I work hard on the audio production and the editing, even though we're giving it away. It sounds as good as, and usually better than, media produced in multi-million-dollar studios for huge media corporations.

We give the audio away free on our podcast site.

We do this almost every weekend.

Two months later, someone hears it, likes it, and hires us to do some paid voiceover recording. I am able to rise to the occasion and we make money because I learned the techniques from giving away what I love to do.

This is but one example. Everything I do transfers to everything else I do.

THANK YOU, MOTHER
My mother had a fabric sampler hanging on her wall that read, "'Tis better to be rich and healthy than poor and sick." Hanging this on her wall was a little bit of her slightly dark sense of humor, which I've inherited and sublimated into something much solidly darker, and occasionally as funny. And she *did* have a good long life. She ran her own business, a great antique store, and though she often worked 80 hours a week, she was able travel a lot, and had a good time.

I love her, miss her, and I thank her.

THANK YOU, DAD
My dad was self-employed at many jobs. He was a farmer until he was 40. Later he sold real estate and insurance, then started companies. He also worked 80 hours a week and made as much money as other people who worked 40, but he *called his own shots* and he *loved what he did*.

He *still* loves what he does. At 87 years old, he's still self-employed at a few jobs. And still jumps out of bed in the morning, because he does what he loves.

PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE
I'm more than halfway through my life. And I'm always busy. But when someone asks what I've been up to, I never have an easy answer. I say, "I dunno….gazing at a computer screen? Talking on the phone? Staring out the window?"

The most accurate answer would be "the usual", but you'd have to sit next to me for a week to know what my usual is. I am incredibly busy, and incredibly productive, but I take lots of breaks. And switch between many tasks an hour.

Every day brings new challenges, and it's up to you to meet them, *and then some*.

So, to recap: The Dean Ten-Point Plan (short form), is:

1. QUIT YOUR DAY JOB.

2. WORK INSATIABLY AND DETERMINEDLY.

3. PURSUE THAT WHICH YOU LOVE, NOT A *CAREER* IN THAT WHICH YOU LOVE, AND YOU'LL HAVE A BETTER CHANCE AT A CAREER IN THAT WHICH YOU LOVE.

4. IF YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT WHAT YOU'RE DOING, DON'T TRY TO MARKET IT YET.

5. REMOVE ALL OBSTACLES.

6. STOP BEING A VICTIM. IN EVERYTHING.

7. WHEN YOU CAN'T REMOVE AN OBSTACLE OR ROUTE AROUND IT, *TURN IT INTO A WIN*.

8. STAY OFF OF MYSPACE AND FACEBOOK.

9. FIND PEOPLE WHO ONLY CARE ABOUT MONEY, AND PUT THEM IN CHARGE OF SELLING YOUR WORK, SO YOU CAN STAY FOCUSED ON THE *WORK*.

10. YOU *CANNOT FAIL*

ACTION:

- **Write down short form of THE DEAN TEN-POINT PLAN and hang it on your wall.**
- ***Start working* toward quitting your day job and making a living doing something you love.**

So, grasshopper, that's my crash course in quitting your day job.
Good luck. And please post on our forum about how it works out for you.

In the next chapter, "Organization Building", we'll learn how to interface with others in work situations and in organizations that you create yourself. Which, I think, really is the ultimate in realizing dreams: *Working well with a team*.

You can do more with others than you can by yourself. That's the basis of society, and of all civilization.

But you don't have to accept the "accepted" society, you can *invent your own*. You can therefore avoid, to a large degree, the pitfalls of the established systems at large. You become a strong, smart, nimble *work ninja*, jumping ahead and out of the way as the old, established systems crumble into dust under their own rigidity.

Chapter 16 - Organization Building

NEW USES FOR OLD TOOLS
Organization Building is working effectively in teams, large or small. It differs from conventional "team building" workshops and retreats in every way. There are no "group-dynamic games" needed.

> "Group-dynamic games" are exercises where a "team building consultant" is hired to come into a company for a few days and leads employees through problem-solving exercises. The goal is to try and learn to work together more effectively.

We aren't going to do that. We aren't playing games here. This is the real deal.

Organization Building (which we also call "Org Building") is more about working with simple voluntary bylaws *from the beginning*. Using The Only Two Rules in Life with AA's *12 Traditions* can be effective for Org Building anything from a two-person company working across the Internet on a single, short-term project, to a multinational corporation with offices in all of the world's largest cities.

The Only Two Rules in Life are a given. You cannot have ethical interactions with *anyone* without them.

AA's 12 Traditions can help regardless of whether the organizations are informal or formal; ad hoc or ongoing. They can help a small for-profit business, a tiny non-profit organization, a local rock band, or a dedicated group of people *selling* nothing, but rather *giving away* an idea for true social change, that is, creating a *movement* to *change the world*.

AA started with a simple idea that people wanted and needed. An idea that was wanted and needed *and* was so elegantly simple that it could be transmitted one man to another *just by talking* ("first-century apostle" style). AA's spread and

continuation is, *in and of itself*, an amazing example of the power of Org Building, from the grassroots level in someone's living room to the global and ongoing.

APPLYING THE 12 TRADITIONS OF AA TO ANY GROUP, ORGANIZATION OR COMPANY

Most people have heard of AA's 12 Steps, even if they're not in AA.

The 12 Steps of AA deal with the recovery of the *individual*.

Lesser understood by non-AA members (and even to many members), are The 12 *Traditions* of AA. The 12 Traditions keep each local AA *group* from spinning out of control. They keep the group focused, solve personality disputes, and allow the fellowship to keep to their primary purpose: helping alcoholics recover.

> NOTE: For AA service groups at the *world* level, AA also has "The 12 Concepts of World Service": http://www.alcoholicsanonymous-acapulco.com/12_concepts_alcoholicsanonymous_acapulco.html

I suggest people study the 12 Traditions of AA as unofficial guidelines for managing their life *in relation to others*. These ideas work very well in Org Building and project management, which are really about *time* management and *people* management. The 12 Traditions have worked to solidify AA, an organization that has not only not fallen apart, but has *thrived* since 1935.

The 12 *Steps* have been applied to recovery from destructive obsessions to many things: alcohol, codependence, drugs, cigarettes, gambling, sex and more.

The 12 *Traditions* have been applied to *very little*, *other than running 12-Step groups*. And even in 12-Step groups, not everyone in the program knows and understands the 12 Traditions.

HOW THIS RELATES TO MAKING YOUR MARK IN THE WORLD

I've studied these Traditions extensively, and have made them a part of my daily interactions with the world for fifteen years. I pretty much have The 12 Traditions ingrained on a cellular level by now. When confronted with an issue of Team Management or Org Building, I don't ask myself, "What tradition applies here?", just as I usually cannot answer "What step are you on?"

I'm on *all the Steps* and use *all the Traditions*, all the time.

A lot of this stuff is *human nature*, if you have integrity. Some people already practice the 12 Traditions intuitively, perhaps without having ever read them.

The 12 Traditions of AA are fundamentally an extrapolation of The Natural Law...of The Only Two Rules in Life.

Again, they are:
THE ONLY TWO RULES IN LIFE:

- **Do not initiate, or accept, force.**
- **Keep your word.**

Getting paid to do what you love requires interfacing on an ethical level with other people. We are here to interface. The 12 Traditions of AA as applied to Org Building will help you to interface well, with reason, and with *results*.

THE 12 TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

LEGAL:
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These are the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

"HOW IT WORKS"
Below are explanations of how I apply each of these Traditions in the Org Building part of LifeAmp:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. And overall, it's pretty self-explanatory, and covered well by most of what PESD does, with individuals and with a group. Deleting roadblocks is your first goal. Protecting yourself is your first goal. It's not selfish, it's life. Everything collapses if you don't take care of yourself first.

In AA, putting the group first is not a "Submit to the group will" initiation of force. It's more "Let's not sink this boat, or we'll all drown." A common way I've heard this said in AA is "If you have an AA bumper sticker on your car, don't drive like a jerk, because that bumper sticker makes you an emissary for us all, even though you're acting as an individual."

For any organization or group, any known member acting alone reflects on the whole group. You're an ambassador or an embarrassment, depending on your behavior. Especially if you're wearing a company or group T-shirt or otherwise *telling people* that you *represent* that company or group. Many people will look at everything you do and think, "I guess that's what your whole group does."

As for unity in decisions, AA often doesn't even take a vote. They take a "group conscience." The term originated in AA, and is different from a group *consensus*. A *group conscience* involves discussion and sometimes even prayer. It's taking the pulse of the spiritual "vote" of the group, rather than just a quick show of hands.

Arrival at a group conscience is often opened with a prayer, then accomplished by a (usually) respectful debate combined with unofficially "poling the jury" *until things work*. It can take weeks, or it can take a minute, and it is effective. Often much more so than democracy where, as the saying goes, "51% can tyrannize 49%."

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

The God part doesn't have to enter into the corollaries I'm drawing with Org Building. It may or may not be relevant, as some members of your group may be religious, some agnostic and some atheists.

Many great organizations, institutions and movements have been effectively run by religious people who believed they were guided in their every move by the hand of the creator. I'm all for it, until they run up against people and *initiate force* in the name of God, as does occasionally happen.

The second part of Tradition Two is crucial: "Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." This helps avoid personality clashes, and cults of personality.

One thing that AA does wisely is rotate "leaders" periodically. Usually, no one stays the leader of a particular meeting for more than six months or a year. This prevents it becoming "MY meeting" to that person. Which is good. It's not *any one person's meeting*. It's *everyone's* meeting. At *all* meetings.

On the rare occasion where this tradition is ignored and it does become one person's meeting, that meeting quickly strays from really being AA. It becomes ego driven and the resulting chaos stops helping the new person who is just walking in the door. (And the newcomer may think that "this meeting represents all meetings" and never go to a meeting again. Refer back to Tradition One for more on this.)

> Any newly sober member of AA gets the same one vote in the group as the person who's been sober in that meeting for 20 years.

A strong idea is more important than the founder of that idea. People change and people die, but a strong enough idea is timeless and even potentially *eternal*. But it *must* be strong enough to survive any of its leaders leaving the organization, passing on, retiring, or being fired. An idea also does well to be strong enough to *outlive* its founders and leaders and carry on to the next generation….

> …that is unless it's an idea carried out by an ad-hoc org that only has to survive for a short period until the goal is reached.
>
> I think a problem with many org builders is that they use a "one size fits all" mentality and apply typical corporate org goals (leaders stay in for life, expand the org forever, etc.) to all orgs.
>
> I find that different orgs require different power structures. You should consider *all* options and pick the structure that is *best* for the org you're working on at the moment.

Sometimes a project has open membership, based on merit, but has a team leader (sometimes jokingly called the "designated benevolent despot"). This team leader keeps things on track. Many open-source collaborative software efforts function like this. And sometimes their leaders are ousted by group consensus (or a group conscience!) Sometimes even when the team leader *is the original creator of the software!*

When an idea ceases to be useful, or the people administering the idea become too bitter with infighting, or become too corrupt, someone will come up with something else to replace it. The people in "power" in the old system will try to save their jobs. They'll fight the new thing and cling to the old while "defending the principles" even though they're no longer even *living* the principles.

They will either be defeated in self-defense by something braver and bolder, or just get replaced *when no one pays attention to their work anymore* (which is generally far sadder for them, because they don't get to go out as a martyr). Either way, it ain't pretty for them.

> "God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion."
> -- Thomas Jefferson.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

People do this at meetings every time they say, "My name is _____ and I'm an alcoholic."

Reducing the AA membership requirement to simply *a desire to join* has an interesting genesis. Before this "rule", when AA started, each group had their *own* rules. Years after AA began, the national office in New York asked each group to mail in their rules. The New York office realized that if *all* the rules were implemented at every meeting, absolutely no one would be able to be a member anywhere!

This is good to remember.

I like the idea of groups and organizations *where you're a member when you say you are*. Innocent until proven guilty. If people have to jump through too many hoops, if someone is keeping a roster and writing down addresses and charging a fee, then you're going to turn away good people. It's often best to let people in based on merit, desire and nothing else.

Merit doesn't only extend to leadership. Every army needs privates, and every meeting needs someone to make coffee. Every organization needs typists, proofreaders, people to carry heavy objects and to just generally take care of small-but-important day-to-day tasks.

On the other hand, don't let a SV troll stick around in your group.

If someone is seriously disruptive at an AA meeting, they're asked to leave. They are usually allowed to come back after a while, and this makes sense in an organization where the stated purpose is to save lives. If you ban 'em for life, it could be looked at as a death sentence.

But I don't feel this idea of "letting them come back" need apply in an organization that is concerned with quality of life, and that does not think "you'll die if you don't embrace our way." Banning someone for undermining your org, banning a totally counterproductive SV, is *not* an initiation of force. *It's self-defense*. I'd ban 'em after they violate the first warning, period. Don't even wait to see the whites of their eyes a second time. Maybe even ban 'em at *first* infraction, depending on the severity, and depending whether they really are "right" for your group.

I see far too many orgs letting destructive people stick around because they don't want to "play cop."

If you plan on banning people who get in the way of your mission statement, it should probably be stated up front, as reflected in your charter or terms of service.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

For ORGS:
Some organizations are best structured so that each individual group can function on its own, as long as it follows the basic precepts and sprit of the org's spirit and doesn't harm the org overall.

The autonomous "independent cells with one goal" idea allows for faster expansion and smoother operation because no one has to run every little thing by central leadership.

For example, one could describe the goals on a website, state what is needed from others, then invite people to implement the goals and ideas into action in their own town/state/country. Anyone who abides by this may use the organization's name, logos and ideals, as long as they use a disclaimer that *they are not representative* of the org *as a whole*.

AA works like this and it has spread far and wide as a result.

Another org that works in a similar manner is the volunteer-run women's culture festival series LadyFest.
www.ladyfest.org

A LadyFest can be set up by any woman in any city, and all LadyFests operate independently, as long as they are conducted in a way that is in keeping with the org's mission statement.

> (I became aware of LadyFest when they showed my *D.I.Y. or Die* movie at several different cities' festivals.)

For MOVEMENTS:
Sometimes an idea, just stated *in one place*, will be strong enough urge people on to pick it up and run with it. Like the Free State Project
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_state_project
www.freestateproject.org

Which was inspired by an essay by Jason Sorens:
www.ncc-1776.org/tle2001/libe131-20010723-03.html

Other positive projects have come out of the Free State Project process, including Free State Wyoming. www.freestatewyoming.org

www.fundamentalsoffreedom.com/fswforum/index.php?topic=24.0

FOR NANOCORPS:
With some projects, it can work well to create an autonomous nanocorp of between two and ten brilliant people. As I've said, this can be done from different cities or even countries now, with you working out of your laptop in a backpack, even while not having a set address. This enables you to travel, have fun, see the world, and have more privacy (because it's harder for people you don't want to see to "find you").

Because of the low (no) overhead, a nanocorp can be very profitable, if that's your motive, and if you're very smart and driven.

The quicksilver nature of nanocorps makes them excellent candidates for autonomous structure, with members reporting to no one; and with very short, limited and lax bylaws, or even non-existent bylaws.

THE AD-HOC NATURE OF THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS
The nanocorp can be ongoing, or it can be ad-hoc. In an ad-hoc capacity the nanocorp works intensely on a project for six or twelve or eighteen months, as long as necessary to accomplish all its goals, then dissolves and the people move on to other projects and companies.

The film industry is usually comprised of companies too large in scale to be described as nanocorps, but the industry these days usually operates in an ad-hoc way. Each Hollywood film is administered by a new corporation or LLC, even if the film is financed and distributed by a media giant. The corporation or LLC exists only to enable that *one* film. This ad-hoc company employs different talented people who suit the needs of that project.

Directors and producers often work with some of the same people, but usually no two films have exactly the same crew and actors. The choice of people on a given film is partially based on particular skills, and based on a good working relationship with the director or producer. Sometimes it's based on who's *available*, but merit and a track record are still going to be major considerations in that decision.

When the film is done it is sold to one of the big studios. After it's released, the ad-hoc company usually stays in existence for a while, with a small staff, just to do things like hire accountants and administer royalties. But the creative minds of the project are on to other projects and companies.

FOR COMPANIES:
The day of the large factory is fading, at least in America (where factory work is more and more outsourced elsewhere). Now the successful businesses and world-changing movements are more often small, intelligent swarms of human brains…highly mobile groups working across the world from laptops. Progress now is mostly about *ideas*.

I believe that nanocorps and ad-hoc companies are the future of business, from the smallest to the largest. It is more efficient to keep the brains separate from the brawn in the creation and execution equation, to keep the beast from growing too large and stupid and falling into the tar pits of history under its own lumbering weight.

Don't be unchangeable and drown by refusing to drop the rock of complex bureaucratic structure and an unneeded desire to *keep things the same*. Make your group exceedingly efficient, adaptable and mobile.

You are a work ninja, your companies should be work ninjas, too.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

This doesn't mean you should be a drone who only thinks of the group, but it does mean that you *do need to* think of the group. Do things with *purpose*, don't get distracted and dilute your plans. And often, the group doesn't exist as an end, it exists as a *means*. It's just the "bus to get you there."

Keep your primary purpose *primary*. If your org's needs expand beyond the scope of your charter, you don't always have to expand your charter. You can *start another org*.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

Lending your org's good name can be problematic. As can having someone lend your org their name. When you endorse something or someone, you become associated with that entity. If it later comes out that they committed massive fraud, or their CEO was a pedophile and/or a murderer, no one is going to want to do business with you.

A lot of times there seems to be an upside to attaching your org to a more prominent name, but think of possible downsides, like those enumerated above.

Don't fall prey to the apparent Catch-22 that "No one will notice you until you're big, and you won't be big until someone notices you." Because a good idea is a good idea is a good idea, and if presented well, people will want to *spread it for you*. (Like that old shampoo commercial, "You tell two friends, and they tell two friends, and they tell two friends….")

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

The reason AA self-imposed this "no-free lunch" structure was that people are so used to drunks constantly asking for a handout. AA decided fairly early on that they would not be a charity. Being self-supporting showed the world *in action*, rather than simply in *words*, that AA had the power to transform bums into productive members of society.

Also, if you mostly cover your operating expenses out of external donations, people who are not members of your group may *expect something in return*. And if they donate *a lot*, they may expect some "ownership" and control, even if they don't say that when they give you the money.

The best start-up companies now require very little money. They mostly require *good ideas* and *smart, driven people*. There is such a boom in the mobile office. Collaboration software, word processing, database, web design, graphic layout, page layout, audio and video editing, encryption, etc., are all available to anyone as shareware, just plain cheap or even free.

> They say "the press is only free if you own one." And with computers, I now own one. So can you. Any computer with even a dial-up connection is a world-wide uncensorable newspaper. If you have DSL, it's a worldwide uncensorable radio station and TV station.
>
> But it's no longer really true that "the press is free if you own one." The press is only free if you also own *the means of getting people to pay attention to your message.* That's where I put most of my time.

I wrote and published this book, maybe even started a movement, on a 700-dollar off-the-shelf computer, a hundred dollars worth of coffee, and nothing else, except my brain, and twelve weeks of 100-hour-a-week dedication. My fading resentments and humble laptop churned out the tiny mustard seed that will grow into a worldwide field of mighty and beautiful oaks.

Figure 16.1
During the three months I was writing this book,
I constantly carried with me the tiny seed pod of page-layout files,
before finally uploading them to the printer to change the world

BRILLIANCE, NOT MONEY

Starting something new is often done easiest if it's *not* all about money, but rather about *important ideas*. Money will come later, if you need it, and if your idea is something that people need. And if you need something *physical* created from your ideas (CDs, books, T-shirts, etc.), that sort of thing can now be produced on-demand (printed with each order and shipped from uploaded files, like this book was). Manufacturing of machines, parts or final products can be done locally in your neighborhood, or outsourced to China and India. (Though keep in mind people in China may pirate it, and I've heard tell that a lot of identity theft originates with tech support call centers in Bangalore. Sometimes outsourcing of call center work is also done to felons in American prisons. *It's 11 PM. Do you know where your credit card info is?*)

For LifeAmp, I think the "takeaway" of the Seventh Tradition of AA is that there is nothing at all wrong with someone making money spreading good ideas, if they do it in a way that people *want* to pay for it. Thinking any other way would be communist, socialist or make you a bum. The idea of getting paid just for making an *effort*, rather for actually *earning money*, reminds me of the mind of any 15-year-old hippie who thinks "E*verything should be free, man"*, but has never worked a day in his life to earn his own food.

No one should expect the government, or anyone, to pay them to sit around and create. I know that some countries subsidize art. And government-funded social outreach programs are currently all the rage in America, but *it's unethical*. It's an initiation of force. Representatives deciding that my taxes should help "the less fortunate" (or, as with the current "bailouts", the *more* fortunate) is initiation of force against *me*. Even if a majority of voters decide that my taxes should go to anything other than the military (defensive, not offensive), peace officer police, or *very basic* infrastructure, it's still an initiation of force. That's not what the United States was set up to do.

Nothing you have planned, no matter how helpful to society you think it is, deserves to have money taken from *my* pocket without *my* consent.

Without my consent, that's stealing.

> As for the "price of admission" to AA, there is none. Membership is open to all. This isn't the best bet for all (or even most) orgs, but should not be dismissed outright, because it can work well for some orgs. Again, avoid a "one size fits all" mentality and find the best structure for *your* org.
>
> As for the *literal* price of admission, they do pass the basket at meetings, and everyone who can afford it puts in a buck or two. This pays for the room rental, the snacks and the coffee. Any leftover is mailed in every few months to the World Services office for operating costs, after taking out a "prudent reserve." (Usually a hundred or two hundred bucks, for any unplanned costs for that meeting, like say if an angry drunk breaks a window and won't pay for it.)
>
> (The "prudent reserve" idea predates AA. Many of AA's ideas predate AA, but were put together in AA in new and useful ways.)
>
> The whole AA structure seems to be excellent system for running organizations with low overhead and important ideas to spread.

(By the way, newcomers to AA aren't expected to put money in the basket, as it's understood that people just getting sober usually have their finances in disarray.)

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

The "special workers" they mention include secretaries, mail clerks, typesetters, webmasters, etc. Some are members of AA, many are not.

A problem with most organizations is that they desire to become "professional", in the sense of taking on a corporate mentality that "bigger is better", that "we *must* constantly expand." In reality, organizations can be small and focused to one or two primary ideas, pay a decent salary and health insurance to founders and employees, and last a long time doing a lot of good. Think of a family restaurant that stays in business for many generations and just makes great food for the neighborhood. Or think about America at its inception, as envisioned by Jefferson

It's when organizations think they must expand and "conquer the world" that the most problems arise, both for the organizations, and for the world. I'm not anti-corporate any more, but people having some success often think they need to grow their org to be huge, when sometimes *smaller is better*.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

AA's board of directors is partially made up of recovering alcoholics, and partially non-alcoholics. They created this system of checks and balances in case the drunks all relapsed and started acting like drunks tend to act, which could kill the whole thing. If this happened, the non-drunks on the board could vote the drunks off the board, for the sake of the whole organization.

There were several recovering alcoholic lawyers involved in the setup of the AA power structure and the wording of the bylaws. This may also be why the AA Steps and Traditions are written so *precisely*. They are practically poetry over legalese.

There were also some former captains of industry in early AA who'd lost everything to drink. These movers and shakers contributed to the way AA does things, and as a result, the system allows for almost any contingency. And it *works*.

AA's checks-and-balances idea of non-alcoholics and alcoholics is reminiscent of the way the three branches of the United States government are supposed to work. But due to the United States government's ongoing expansion, there is now an unending federal climate of "The sky is falling! Everything's an exigent circumstance! Rights will have to be 'temporarily suspended (indefinitely)!"

Our system is grinding to a stoppage as a result.

But AA still *works*. See? They didn't let their checks and balances spin out of control, so their "government" still functions, and functions well.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

AA would never make political statements like I did in the previous section. But I'm not AA, my "primary purpose" is not singular. My primary purpose includes *everything,* as you can tell from the title of this book. And that works for me. But having official opinions on everything will dilute, and often eventually destroy, single-purpose orgs.

There were organizations before AA that successfully got people sober. One took a public stand in support of Prohibition. The internal infighting and external bad press destroyed them.

Sometimes organizations are asked to take an official opinion on something that is outside their purview, beyond their primary purpose. Sometimes they decide "There out to be a law!" or "Think of the children!" and feel that *for just this one issue*, they *need* to use the power of their name to back an "important" idea.

Doing so, even once, could turn away people from your org who would otherwise be helped by you, but who do not agree with your *one stance* on that *one thing* that has *nothing* to do with your raison d'etre.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

This exists because saturating the world with AA advertising would cheapen AA, make it look like "just another product." AA's founders (who were very Christian) imagined that the program would spread organically, one man to another, like Christianity was spread before the advent of modern media. (Ever notice how much the AA book looks like a *Bible*?)

Thinking their program would spread in the same manner as the Word of Christ may seem rather cocksure of the AA founders. But they were *right*! It did spread, one man to another, far and wide, because it contained ideas that people wanted and needed to hear. And it didn't need an ongoing media campaign of *promotion* to do so.

An interesting thing often happens with very new AA members. Before AA, they may have been miserable thieving reprobates for a long time. Then suddenly *they're not*! They join AA, and things quickly get better for them. So they feel that the transformative power of AA is something that every last soul on the earth needs (often regardless of whether every last soul is a drunk or not!). Newcomers will often appoint themselves as one-person public relations agencies and bug everyone they know, and even people they don't know, about AA.

I'll admit that I certainly did this in my very early sobriety. I was a self-appointed one-man AA mouthpiece, practically "waving the banner in the streets" to *promote* AA to the world. (But very soon after that I thought, "I think I could do this better, or at least take it in a different useful direction" which fermented in my mind for fifteen years and contributed to the creation of the book you're holding.)

"Waving the banner in the streets" doesn't help AA. It's actually a little *embarrassing* to AA. But it cannot *destroy* AA, because AA is too strong, and also because every member is autonomous, and *really only represents himself*. So most members who've been around a long time see the jubilant newcomer trying to "sign up the world" and just lovingly laugh at him a little, because the old timers often acted like this at first themselves.

Eventually sobriety quits being "new", the member gains a little more "life on life's terms" recovery (as opposed to just being a *dry drunk*). With time, the newcomer stops embarrassing AA with his heavy-handed *promoting*. He morphs into a living, breathing advertisement, inviting people to look into the program by *attraction*, just by *changing his actions on an ongoing basis*.

He becomes a useful member of society, demonstrating *by example* that he has changed for the better. This living conversion is obvious to everyone who knew how he behaved drunk, so he doesn't have to "preach" ever again. If someone says, "You used to be a drunk, and a creep. Now you're neither. What happened?", he'll tell them. But he doesn't have to use a megaphone or a soapbox to share his experience.

And he remains a good example of AA *working* for anyone he meets going forth. It is his attractive qualities that bring in new people. And this *attraction* works much better than *promotion*.

There's a saying I like, "Don't tell 'em you're sober, show 'em you're sober." *Say it by living it*.

I think the takeaway for LifeAmp is that it's often better to *show* people your org's works in action, in your members' and clients' lives, rather than trumpeting your greatness from the rooftops.

> A spirited treatise on integrity can be a delightful read, but demonstrating those principals by *living* with integrity is worth far more.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

This one exists in AA for two reasons:

-- Being a "celebrity" is counterproductive to recovery. Excessive ego (combined with low self-esteem) is part of the many reasons many people become drunks to begin with.

-- If a person is a "spokesperson for AA", *then relapses*, especially if they do so in a particularly public and embarrassing way, it *does* hurt the image of AA as a whole. People will think, "that stuff doesn't work." (For instance, I can think of one rock star who made herself a spokesperson for AA in print, then relapsed, and pulled a shotgun on some cops when they came by her house to ask her to turn down the music. Made the papers, and wasn't helpful, to her *or* AA.)

The takeaway is this: being a spokesperson for an organization that doesn't need spokespeople can lead to:

1. Ego problems and misery;
2. Harming the group. (Unless you're perfect. Here…let me check your wrists….)

Remember that Al-Anon thing…"Don't just *do* something, *stand there*!" It's great advice for people who've spent their whole lives jumping to try to please an unappeasable drunk. They've tuned their souls to be a Pavlov's dog for the initiation of mental force from their drunken loved one. So for them, "Don't just do something, stand there!" makes sense. "Don't just do something, stand there!"

may seem like death to a codependent, because codependents constantly need to be *doing* something to try to "fix" every situation.

And "Don't just do something, stand there!" can seem like death to a power-driven business type. These folks constantly need to be *doing* something to try to *optimize* and *streamline* every organization. And their need to do so is often subconsciously (or even consciously) driven by *a need to not be anonymous*, **a need to get their *own name and face* to go along for the ride**. They'll do this while *saying* they're selflessly promoting the *organization* and its mission statement.

But there may be times when "Don't just do something, stand there!" might be the best advice a power-driven business type could hear.

Remember this when you or someone in your org feels a need to "take the wheel" in a power-drive to *spread the good news*.

In business, as with amends, sometimes "promptly" is better than "immediately." And there are times when "do nothing at all" works better than "*We'd better do something*."

Look for this, and learn to tell the difference.

HERDING CATS

There you have my point-by-point report…my breakdown on using the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous to help guide any ethical group, organization, company or movement.

I really like The 12 Traditions as a political/social structure for maintaining personal liberty but still accomplishing things as a group. You think business people argue? Try *sober alcoholics*.

AA co-founder (and main architect of The 12 Traditions) Bill Wilson considered AA to be a synthesis of anarchy and democracy. I like that. Those two things are not as far apart as you might think. It's more of a libertarian ideal…Self-governing and problem solving while you're dealing with the differing opinions of other ethical people. (We've already determined and learned what to do with non-ethical and damaged people: *get them out of your way*.)

Bill Wilson wrote:

> "To many minds all this liberty for the individual spells sheer anarchy. Every newcomer, every friend who looks at A.A. for the first time is greatly puzzled. They see liberty verging on license, yet

> they recognize at once that A.A. has an irresistible strength of purpose and action. 'How,' they ask, 'can such a crowd of anarchists function at all? How can they possibly place their common welfare first? What in Heaven's name holds them together?'"
> -- *12 Steps and 12 Traditions,* page 129

The answer? The 12 Traditions hold them together, along with the 12 Steps. Which I've previously done the math on to show how they all just boil down to *The Only Two Rules in Life.*

ACTION:

- **Think of ways to use the techniques in this chapter in any groups, organizations or companies you are involved with.**
- **Show this chapter to people in those groups, and if they're willing, try practicing them.**
- **If they're not willing, take your resentment and your laptop elsewhere and start your *own* group!**

(Extra credit):

- ***If you want*, do the written math yourself on how each of the 12 Traditions relates to one (or both) of The Only Two Rules in Life.**

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING….
Like you, I'm just a small but important part of the world. I'm just another beautiful and shimmery ant in the pile. But I now know that getting along with others, at least the people you choose to have around after weeding out the ones you *don't* want around, *is one of the most important things in life*.

We're on this planet to *work*, and part of that is *working well with others*. And we should love the work we do.

Thank you for listening. I've loved spending this time sharing my thoughts with you. I sincerely hope that something in this book helped you make your own stay on this big blue ball of confusion a little calmer, sweeter and more productive.

ON PRIORITIES
During the writing of the book you're reading, this chapter was followed by two very long, rather heated chapters where I enumerated *everything that I thought was wrong with the world*, and *what I think people should do to fix it*. The writing in those chapters was really good, the ideas were solid, but after spending a lot of time on it and making the words *sing* on the page, then letting some friends read them, I decided it wasn't the proper way to end this book. (And I had to work

that hard to get them to the point where they really *sang*, really jumped off the page, so I could honestly evaluate whether they worked.)

I finally *threw away* those two long chapters and wrote one much shorter chapter that is much more compassionate. (Without being "puppies and rainbows." *At all*.) I'm really pleased with how it turned out.

There was a time in my life where there would have been *no way* I would have thrown out that much and started over. I would have clung to the rock of "I *worked too hard* to start over!" But I'm learning more and more with experience and age that sometimes you have to cut out the bitchin' guitar solo to better "serve the song."

BRAVELY AND SWEETLY INTO THE FUTURE
The chapter you're about to read is such a distant journey from where this book began. But it also shows *how I got* to where I'm at, and even a little on *where I'm going* with what I've learned. It may inspire you to think a little about where you're headed with what you've learned here, and elsewhere, *out in the world*.

This last chapter is the final takeaway. It ties the circle in a pretty blue ribbon, and boxes it up for you to take home.

OK. Let's read a "Letter to a Young Me."

Chapter 17 – Letter to a Young Me

> "I was twenty-one but couldn't figure out which party to vote against."
> --Robert Heinlein, "Glory Road"

Dear Michael Dean -

Good morning, young me!

I've decided to sit down and write you a letter from the future. I'm 44, you're 22.

It's late 1986. You just moved to San Francisco from Virginia. The move is a big change for you, you've never lived in a city. You're sleeping on your friend's couch in Berkeley while you look for a place in San Francisco that you can afford. Any place. You might even end up living in someone's *garage* for a year. But you'll like it, because you'll feel "free."

You're trying to start a rock band, to carve out your place in the world, make a name for yourself. You're excited, and a little bit worried, about the future.

The reason I'm writing you is to reassure you a bit about the future.

I'm not going to talk down to you, because you're too smart for that. I probably have *reason* to talk down to you, because I'm much smarter than you. Sure, we both have the same I.Q., but you still think you know all there is to know. I know much more than you, including understanding that I do not know all there is to know.

You're probably drunk or high right now. At least hung over. Maybe you're still drunk from last night. When you get this letter, you'll probably think *you* wrote it, but you don't remember writing it. You'll think about it for a day or two, decide you *did* write it, and show it to a few of your new friends. They'll think you're clever. You *are* clever. But you didn't write it, even though I'm you. But since I'm you *later*, I *was* you, but you are not yet *me*.

Confused? Rise and shine, sunshine! Wake and bake. Do a bong hit and relax. Clear your head……OK…….good.

Ready?

I really *like* you, but I gotta say, there are things you do that make me want to smack you in the head. With love, of course. But there is also a lot you do that I still think is really cool, even today. Then there are other things you do that make me sad, make me want to hug you, like an older brother. Or a father.

If I had life to do over, I wouldn't do a lot differently, despite the fact that I'm probably going to tell you some things you that you should do differently.

It doesn't matter anyway, you don't listen to *old* people, so you won't listen to me.

You don't really listen to *anyone*, so you certainly won't listen to any of the things I'm telling you. You're headstrong. This will actually work in your favor later, once you temper it with a bit of humility. But you won't *get* any humility until

you get your ass kicked by life a bit. And being headstrong is part of what will get your ass kicked by life. So I suppose it's all good.

You worry. A lot. You mainly worry about "Will I be OK when I'm older?" You don't tell people that you worry about this, because you want people to think you're fearless. Most of the time you pull that off. You *convince yourself* that you're fearless, because you want to believe it so badly. Convincing yourself it's true is what lets you know you're not lying when you say it to others.

You tell people, "I'll be dead and famous by age 30." You say this so often that you actually believe it. But deep down, you probably don't believe it. Or at least don't want to believe it.

You tell people that the reason you plan to be dead by 30 is because so many of your heroes died before they turned 30. But the real reason you plan to be dead by 30 is because taking care of yourself longer than that seems impossible.

Being secretly afraid of the future is about the only thing you're really ashamed of. You aren't really known for your sense of shame. But that's OK too.

Well, I'm here to tell you *not to worry*, little brother. You *will* be OK when you're older. You'll be much happier. And you won't starve to death, like you're worried you might. You won't get hit by a car and killed in that bike messenger job you'll get next week and have for two years. And when you're older, you'll still be creative (more so) and productive (*much* more so). And you'll even still be able to have lots of sex.

I only mention that because I know that any discussion that doesn't include sex is a discussion you probably don't want to have. I know you say that "without sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, I might as well be dead." But of the three, sex is the most important to you. It's pretty much the most important thing in the world to you.

Don't worry, it's still very important to me, and I'm really good at it. Even better at it at 44 than you are at 22. And you're pretty damn good at it now. So stop worrying about the future regarding that, too. I do know you worry about that. And please know that life without the drugs and without the daily rock 'n' roll isn't like being dead. At all.

Part of your idea of "being OK in later life" means being a rock star. Well, that ain't gonna happen. I would tell you something I've learned from experience, that "rock 'n' roll ain't everything", but you'd argue with me. And I don't want to argue with you.

You will start a great band though, and soon. Next month, in fact. A lot of people will love your music. A lot of people *still* love your music. Strangers often write me and tell me how much they liked that band, even though it broke up 18 years ago.

They write me through my computer. Yup. My computer. Oh yeah, you'll have a computer, even though you now think that computers are only for boring geeks who have no life.

In fact, you'll have many computers, over many decades, as well as having several computers at any given *time* most of the time. Sometimes you'll even use more than one computer *at a time*, with two screens glowing in front of you.

You'll spend so much time working with your computers that your guitars will gather dust in a closet. (Once you get them out of the pawn shop, but don't worry about that right now, you don't pawn them until much later.) But your guitars gathering dust will be OK too. And you'll still play them once in a while, and when you do, you'll still be better at singing and playing than most people who do that full time.

You won't get to be a rock star, but you will make some great music, tour the world, and get to *feel* like a rock star for a while. And (more importantly to you), you'll get to *act* like a rock star, *and* "get away with it", at least most of the time.

It's actually probably a very *good* thing that you won't get to be a rock star. Because if all your dreams came true anytime soon, you'd probably start believing in the whole image, and it would probably kill you. Literally.

Let's see…I'm not sure there's a lot you need to do differently. Well, you *do* come close to dying a bunch of times, and sometimes you aren't even aware of it. You put yourself in a lot of very dangerous situations. But you are also living proof of that old saying "God looks after fools, drunks, and little children."

You are at least two of those things. And I say that with all the love in the world.

Hmmmm…You should learn to type. As I recall, you don't do that until you're 32 (yes, you do live to be 30, and then some). You should probably learn to type now. But you won't. And oh yeah, don't make fun of people who use computers, but I've already covered that.

You should probably stop making fun of people in AA. That's all I'll say about that for now. I hope I'm not upsetting you. Do another bong hit. And pop open a beer. It's 10 AM, what are you waiting for?

You should also probably stop laughing at fat people. I know you only do it under your breath, you're not *mean*, but seriously, stop it. You weigh 125 now, but you won't always. Though you'll stay in pretty good shape, and still be able to do a full split when you're me, and we'll *always* have tons of energy.

Let's see…what else? That friend whose couch you're currently sleeping on, well, he later goes to Harvard and is now a high-end attorney. He's very happy. Though eventually you will also be very happy, even though you dropped out of college…if you can call community college "college."

It's more like "high school with ashtrays."

And the high-end attorney's little sister…the gal you gave bass lessons to before you moved to California? She'll write a series of bestselling books for young adults that get made into blockbuster movies. Your daughter will really like those movies. Well, at least the first one of the series.

Your daughter is three years old. She's a great kid, and I can tell you that she does grow up to be a great adult.

Here's my advice: spend more time with her. I'm not going to say anymore about it….Just *spend more time with her*. You'll be glad you did, and she'll appreciate it too.

Ok, what else? Politics….Ahhh…politics…you're gonna *love* this part. OK, I'm being a bit passive-aggressive, and I promised I wouldn't talk down to you, so I'll be truthful: You'll *hate* this part. But I'm gonna *love* telling you about it!

You've always dismissed your Republican dad for being so politically conservative. But *I* actually think he's too liberal.

Confused? Here's a hint: *his* views don't change.

You remember those people at the card table in the student union at your college? You thought they were marijuana activists, but you didn't like them, even though you like marijuana. You didn't like them because they seemed like they were on such a *mission*, and you're afraid of anyone on a mission.

Well, they weren't marijuana activists, they were *libertarians*. By the way, you'll *be one of them* someday.

You don't know what "libertarian" means. Well, little brother, it means the opposite of "authoritarian." Sci-fi writer John Scalzi says of libertarians "…the whole of their political philosophy boils down to *Get Off My Property*." John Scalzi is basically correct…because libertarians tend to consider our bodies, our minds, our privacy, *as well as* our land, to be part of our *property*.

I'll give you the quick version: Libertarians are kinda like your dad, if your dad wanted even *less* government, but if he also thought drugs should be legal, and knew that anything people do in their own homes that doesn't hurt anyone else is *not* the government's business.

I almost want to suggest to you, "Go find some libertarians. Go find them and *listen*. Don't argue, just listen. There are even a few in San Francisco, though not many. But you're smart, so you'll be able to find them."

But you won't go find them, because they can't help you become a rock star.

You won't listen to *any* of this, because people have free will, and you like to exercise yours more than most. That will get you in trouble for a while, but go ahead and do it anyway. It's good to exercise your free will so it doesn't get out of shape and flabby. Having well-toned free will is going to come in handy later on when you learn about the true nature of liberty.

You always sorta liked those stories in school about the Founding Fathers, but *I've* actually read what they had to say, rather then letting some teacher tell me what they had to say.

When you become me, you'll come to love Thomas Jefferson but dislike George Washington. You'll *hate* Alexander Hamilton. But that's OK, you don't know who he is now, because you skipped class that day to go hang out in the library and read, so you could "actually *learn* something."

But when you become me, you'll be very interested in all this. And you'll also have a lot more to talk about with Dad than you do now. By the way, Dad and I get along *really well* now. And not just because our politics are closer, by far, than they used to be back when I was your age. (I know, I know, when anyone says, "When I was your age…", you stop listening. Please don't. I'm haven't gotten to the best parts yet.)

I call myself a *minarchist libertarian*. Even though you have a huge vocabulary, you don't know that that means. It kinda sounds like "anarchist" to you. Well, that's pretty close. But it's got nothing to do with that anarchy symbol you have on the back of your leather jacket. You just have that because it looks cool.

You don't really know what "anarchy" means. You think it means "chaos." Being an anarchist simply means answering to the Natural Law rather than answering to man's laws.

Right now you call yourself an anarchist, but for some reason you also vote Democrat. You do this even though Democrats are in favor of *much more* government. You probably vote for them because they're sometimes in favor of less-strict pot laws. And since you don't make any money, you don't care about, or even understand, fiscal conservatism.

But one day, one of your favorite sayings will be, "I'm open minded! Some of my best friends are liberals!"

And remember when Dad told us that our great great great great great great grandfather, Joseph Cornish, died in battle in the Revolutionary War? Dad told us that, but you didn't care. You don't understand the idea of someone dying for a cause. But mainly, you thought it was square to care about "old dead-people history junk." Because it won't help you become a rock star.

Well, eventually you'll care, *a lot*. And you'll feel that Joseph Cornish is the coolest thing associated with you that you didn't actually do yourself.

You'll come to call yourself "patriotic." That word scares you now, I know. Sorry. But the thing that will allow you to become patriotic is this: you'll finally figure out that *your government is not your country*. You think they're the same thing. They're not.

I love my country, but distrust the government far more than you do.

Michael - you say you're very into "freedom." But you don't really know what freedom is. You just hate being told what to do. You're not really into freedom. I know this because you think the government should pay you to make art. You think the government should take care of *everything*. I'd say that that makes you and the government *codependent*. Though you don't yet know what that word means, either. It's not in your vocabulary because it would worry you if you knew what it meant. And your current idea of "freedom" has you feeling justified in doing things that often infringe on the rights of others.

You say you're into "freedom." And yet you currently think there should be *more* laws. I've heard you. You sometimes say, "There oughta be a *law*!" And sometimes you mean it.

But later in life, whenever someone says, "There oughta be a *law*!", about *anything*…when someone says "…but think of the *children*!", you'll likely reply, "You think about *your* children, and I'll think about mine, thank you." (Though you might also tell them, *Get Off My Property*….")

Let's see….what else?...OK, guns. You currently *hate* guns. You're very scared of them and think they should be banished from the face of the earth. Except you still think police should have them, to protect you from the bad guys who will still have guns.

You're gonna love this part too. OK, I'll be honest, you're gonna hate it: I now own *five* guns, and I plan on buying more. I've been born again, from the barrel of a gun.

And I'm getting to be a pretty good shot!

Someday you'll learn that guns, in the hands of the honest, save lives. Protect the home. Prevent misery. Oppose tyranny. And feed the hungry.

And you'll one day become so upset at the fact that you can't legally carry a gun in California that you'll move to Wyoming. Oh yeah, did I mention that you're going to move to Wyoming? You'll live out in the country. On a farm.

You moved to San Francisco from the State of Virginia because Virginia bored you.

The place you'll end up in Wyoming looks like Virginia, except with few trees and far fewer people.

If a sideshow fortune teller told you you'll live in Wyoming some day, you'd say, "Yeah right. On a farm!...never gonna happen! You're a swindler. *There outta be a law*….But I guess you can keep my dollar, you earned it, because you're making me laugh pretty damn hard right now."

Michael, you currently hate the idea of money. You hate the idea of business. You think that all corporations are evil, and you're very suspicious of people who have steady jobs. And you'll hate money for a long time.

Eventually you'll love the idea of commerce. (You'll change your mind right about the time you start *making* some money.)

Let's see, what else? We've covered sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll; we covered money, politics, patriotism, freedom, fatherhood…Do I have any other advice for you?

OK, here's one. Don't smoke tobacco. Quit now. You don't want to be hooked on that stuff.

Alright, you got me…I admit it. I'm just telling you that because I'm *still* hooked on smokes, and I'm out of 'em at the moment. If you'd quit back then, and stayed quit, I wouldn't be jonesing for a cigarette right now….

I guess overall, if I could tell you one thing that you might actually *hear*, I'd say, "Be a little kinder to yourself. In everything." You're pretty tough on your body and your mind.

I *might* also say, "Don't hang out with all those broken women who say they love you then later want to stab you in your sleep." But I won't tell you that. Because if you don't go through that, over and over and over (while expecting different results each time), there's a book you won't be able to write.

Oh yeah, you're going to write books. A lot of them. And they will be read by far more people than will ever hear your music.

Don't worry about all those crazy girls you're currently sleeping with. Some of them are cute, and besides, they all tell good stories. Some of them *are* good stories.

Consider those gals practice…for eventually learning to successfully block crazy people out of your life. Those gals are also for you to practice on so you can learn to make love better and better.

By the way, you're wrong about marriage. Marriage isn't for squares. You'll be married one day, and you'll love it. My wife is wonderful. She's pretty, sexy, loving, kind, a great cook, gives great backrubs, and she's as smart as me. Maybe even a little bit smarter.

Some guys have a midlife crisis where they have an affair, leave their wife, and run off to California with some other woman.

My midlife change has been discovering liberty *with my wife*, loving her even more as we grow together, and planning to run off *from* California *with her*.

Future you and the wife will be a *nation of two*. You'll talk about everything under the sun, all day and all night, all the time. You'll be really sweet to each other. And you won't need to go out and party because you two alone on a Saturday night (or any night) *is* a party.

You will never again think marriage is for squares. It's like hanging out with your best friend all the time, except you get to sleep with your best friend.

She's a good artist. You like women who are artists. But she's a *great* editor. And if you need *one thing*, it's a great editor. You do have a good way with words. But you use too many of them. You need to get better at saying what you really mean, rather than simply loving the sound of your own voice.

Unlike many people, you'll actually really dig your mother-in-law and father-in-law. And your father-in-law will be an influence on you politically, when you ask him, "What are your politics?" and he replies, "Depends on the issue. If it's abortion, I'm to the left of Nancy Pelosi. If it's social welfare, I'm to the right of Genghis Khan."

That will have you scratching your head for *weeks*, until you decide to do further research. Which you'll do on your computer. (Trust me on this, you can do global research from a small portable computer the size of a book now.) This research helps start you down to road of change that leads up to you calling yourself "a recovering liberal." And leads you to move to Wyoming.

By the way, your father-in-law votes Republican, but you'll eventually figure out that he's probably more libertarian than many people who call themselves libertarians.

Anything else? Well, I'd recommend that you spend less money on drugs & booze and spend some of that money on gold instead. Bury it somewhere. But don't bury it while you're drunk, you tend to not remember things you do while drunk. But yeah, buy gold. I know you don't like money, but gold ain't a bad thing.

I guess I'll close with a letter I just got from future us, from when we're 60. You *never* thought you'd live to be 30, let alone 60. But I'll share the letter with you anyway:

Dear me at 44,

When we were 22, we wrote,

> "I'm just killin' time, in the meantime time is killing me. What are any of us anyway, other than an ephemeral flash in the night sky of eternity? Chalk on the sidewalk awaiting the rain of death?
>
> Sure, there have been some great people in history, but aren't we all really just shaved apes? We groom away our many moments until we finally turn to dust and pack off to that dreamless sleep forever…."

You don't feel this way anymore. Working out the demons, growing older with joy, finding true love, and now, learning more about real freedom and liberty have all helped to create this change. You've a much more hopeful outlook on life, even as the TV lie-o-vision of 2009 yells "The sky is falling! We're all gonna die!"

Another catalyst that leads to your more positive outlook was surviving the car accident you were in when we were 37, seven years after you'd originally planned to be dead. The change actually came less from surviving the accident and more from what happened *during* the accident.

You remember the accident. You were in the passenger seat, and neither you or the driver saw it coming. The driver was paying attention to the road.

She was sober. It was a warm, sunny afternoon. Everything was fine for you one moment. The next, we'd been smashed in the right rear bumper by a hit-and-run driver. Our car spun around four times while screeching across three lanes of traffic, somehow without hitting anyone else on the busy Burbank highway. We came to a complete stop on the opposite shoulder, facing the wrong way.

We walked away from it.

During the spin, we became very calm. The world slowed to a crawl. Seconds echoed into minutes, our vision narrowed to a fuzzy tunnel.

We almost felt like we were watching the whole thing over our shoulder from the back seat.

Our life did *not* flash before our eyes. But we did hear some very distinct truths, which were expressed out loud inside our soul in complete sentences. They were:

> "Do not grab the wheel from the driver, it will only make things worse. There's a time and a place to take control, and this is not it."

and

> "In a few seconds you may be dead. Or you may end up in a body cast for a very long time."

We calmly and completely accepted both possibilities.

We used to want to be dead of an overdose by age 30. We've made it thirty years longer than that. Every minute we're given is far more than we ever thought we'd get. Every second is a blissful blessing. We're *SPARED*.

I have reached that courage of conviction where I know my beliefs are worth dying for. If the need arises, I will *know* when it's time to "grab the wheel."

I'm still going to do all I can to prevent any showdown. Because I am, you are, we always will be, *one of the good guys*.

And we can take what comes. *Regardless* of what comes.

Ideally, we will die of old age inside this comfy little country house on 40 acres, in the wife's arms, surrounded by purring cats. We will sweetly and fearlessly pass into whatever exists after the heart stops.

I'm not sure what that will be, but I have enough faith to be sure it won't be bad. And I'm sure it's much more than eternal nothingness.

Well, there you have it, me at 44. Hope that helped. I think it did.

With love,
Michael W. Dean
Cheyenne
June 9, 2024 at 11:47 PM Wyoming time.
With my wonderful wife asleep next to me.

Well, there you have it, me at 22. Hope that helped. Though I'm sure it didn't.

With much love,

Michael W. Dean
Los Angeles
March 23, 2009 at 5:21 AM California time.
With my wonderful wife asleep next to me.

Figure 17.1
A-mew.

Appendix:
Recommended reading, viewing, listening and surfing

Here are a lot of things that have been influential and important in my formation of Life Amplification in general, and PESD in specific. Plus a few things I just really *dig*. And some stuff I wrote, directed, sang, typed, etc.

> (Editor's note: Well, I suppose Michael's tired; expended most of his brilliance on the rest of the book. The above paragraph kind of reads like "I'm tired...."– DJD)

The books and videos listed here are all available from Amazon.

> (With the exception of the stuff I made, inclusion here does not imply an endorsement of me by the people involved with these resources. --MWD)

MICHAEL W. DEAN'S WEBSITES:

Radio Free Nestlandia. Michael Dean and Debra Jean Dean's ongoing podcast.
www.nestlandia.com

Stink Fight! Michael Dean's cats 'n' libertarianism blog.
www.stinkfight.com

Clone the Homeless. Michael Dean and Debra Jean Dean's retired (but still archived) podcast.
www.clonethehomeless.com

I look forward to helping you with your many problems.
For a fee, Michael W. Dean will talk to you over the phone and tell you how to get your printer to print, edit your film, solve your addictions, or how to fine-tune your world-changing movement. For a larger fee, he'll let you fly him out to speak in person at your business, social club or college.
www.michaelwdean.com

Michael Dean Voice
Hire Michael to record himself narrating your film or infomercial.
www.michaeldeanvoice.com

Debra Jean Dean Voice
Hire Michael to record his wife narrating your film or infomercial.
www.debrajeandean.com

LifeAmp
Website for the book you're reading
www.lifeamp.org

LifeAmp forum
Forum for the book you're reading, and a whole bunch o' other stuff, some related, some not, but all still nifty. Make sure to read the early posts, they describe the process of writing, pitching, editing and publishing this book (which all happened in three months).
www.lifeamp.org/forum

BOOKS BY MICHAEL W. DEAN:
(The how-to books all have a lot of good stuff about running and promoting a business, even if you don't plan to make movies, play music, write books or be on YouTube.)

$30 Film School, Second Edition by Michael W. Dean
www.amazon.com/gp/product/1598631896/www30dollarfi-20

$30 Music School by Michael W. Dean
www.amazon.com/30-Music-School-Michael-Dean/dp/1592001718/www30dollarfi-20

$30 Writing School by Michael W. Dean
www.amazon.com/30-Writing-School-Michael-Dean/dp/1592004865/www30dollarfi-20

YouTube: An Insider's Guide to Climbing the Charts by Alan Lastufka and Michael W. Dean
www.amazon.com/YouTube-Insiders-Guide-Climbing-Charts/dp/0596521146/www30dollarfi-20

Digital Music – DIY Now! by Michael W. Dean and Chris Caulder
A guide to making a living making music out of your backpack, from anywhere, and everywhere.
www.diynow.org (free!)

Starving in the Company of Beautiful Women
A novel by Michael W. Dean.
First book Michael published. Basically what would have happened to Michael if he *had* become a rock star. Yeah, he dies. But we get that out of the way on the first page.
www.amazon.com/Starving-Company-Beautiful-Women-Michael/dp/0970539207/www30dollarfi-20

The Simple Pleasures of a Complex Girl
A novel by Michael W. Dean. Written in the second person from a female point of view. Conservative young woman joins Texan anarchist collective that takes down an evil corporate one-world scheme to ruin humanity.
www.texanarchy.com

FILMS DIRECTED BY MICHAEL W. DEAN:

D.I.Y. Or Die: How to Survive as an Independent Artist
www.amazon.com/D-I-Y-Die-Survive-Independent-Artist/dp/B000089Q5W/www30dollarfi-20

Hubert Selby Jr: It/ll Be Better Tomorrow
www.amazon.com/Hubert-Selby-Jr-Better-Tomorrow/dp/B000LC4ZK8/www30dollarfi-20

MICHAEL DEAN MUSIC:
(With downloads, most free, some iTunes)

Bomb. Acid-thick opiate sex rock. Michael Dean sings and plays bass. 1986-1993.
www.hitsofacid.com

Baby Opaque. Death rock/Jazz/ hardcore punk with Michael Bérubé on drums. 1985-1986.
www.babyopaque.com

The Beef People. Hardcore punk rock with Michael Dean on guitar. 1983-1984.
www.kittyfeet.com/beef.htm

Deal Machine. Michael Dean's over-the-internet solo project. 2007-2008.
www.dealmachine.org

Other assorted MP3s of Michael Dean's music:
www.kittyfeet.com/mp3.htm

GREAT BOOKS BY OTHER PEOPLE:

BOSTON T. PARTY'S BOOKS
All seven of Boston's current books are on Amazon, and also available from Javelin Press:
www.javelinpress.com

Molôn Labé! by Boston T. Party
Novel about how patriotic citizens of Wyoming practice self-defense on a large scale. I won't give away more, but this is an intense book. There are times when it reads like fiction. Other times it reads like Boston's crystal ball. Occasionally, it reads like Boston's *Day Planner*.
www.amazon.com/Molon-Labe-Boston-T-Party/dp/1888766077/www30dollarfi-20

You & the Police! by Kenneth W. Royce (Boston T. Party)
Verbal self-defense from being bullied at a cop stop; especially when and how to *shut up.* (Because while "anything you say can and will be used against you", *silence* cannot be used against you!) This is a book on "Jailhouse law" to help keep you out of the jailhouse. Boston says in one of his other books that "a sidearm is only to fight your way back to your rifle." *You & the Police* is to keep you solid and not "shoot yourself in the foot" by shooting off your mouth before your lawyer arrives.
www.amazon.com/You-Police-Kenneth-W-Royce/dp/1888766093/www30dollarfi-20

Hologram of Liberty: The Constitution's Shocking Alliance With Big Government by Kenneth W. Royce (Boston T. Party)
Describes in detail the weasel words the Federalists (the "Founding Lawyers") inserted into our Constitution to initiate the forces that led us into the mess we're in now.
www.amazon.com/Hologram-Liberty-Constitutions-Shocking-Government/dp/1888766034/www30dollarfi-20

BOOKS BY OTHER COOL FOLKS:
The Revolution: A Manifesto by Ron Paul
Plan to save America, written by someone much smarter than me. This guy is the spiritual love child of Thomas Jefferson and Barry Goldwater. Probably the only politician in America, and certainly the only *congressman*, who "gets it." Vote Ron Paul for president, even if you have to write him in.
www.amazon.com/Revolution-Manifesto-Ron-Paul/dp/0446537519/www30dollarfi-20

Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus by Rick Perlstein
Many consider Barry the spiritual father of the Libertarian Party. Michael Bérubé turned me onto this book.
www.amazon.com/Before-Storm-Goldwater-Unmaking-Consensus/dp/1568584121/www30dollarfi-20

More Guns Less Crime by John Lott
The title says it all.
www.amazon.com/More-Guns-Less-Crime-Understanding/dp/0226493636/www30dollarfi-20

The Founders' Second Amendment: Origins of the Right to Bear Arms by Stephen P. Halbrook.
Written by a lawyer, this one traces the actual intent of the Founding Fathers and proves, by citation of letters, speeches and newspaper articles from that era, that the Founders meant 2A as an *individual* right.

The argument is effectively solved in the book's *introduction*:

> *The "right of the people" as used in the First, Second and Fourth Amendments are contrasted with such phrases as "the militia, when in actual service" in the Fifth Amendment and with the powers "reserved to the states respectively" in the Tenth Amendment.*

The book continues for 420 pages, proving that the Second Amendment is an individual right, if anyone still has their doubts.

I sent a letter to Barack Obama and recommended he read this book. (He didn't write back.)
www.amazon.com/Founders-Second-Amendment-Origins-Right/dp/1566637929/www30dollarfi-20

Black Man With A Gun by Kenneth V. F. Blanchard
Written by the cat who wrote the foreword for the book you're holding. The man speaks the truth. Great quick primer to guns of all kinds, and the historical, legal and moral aspects of guns and self-defense. I love this guy and I dig his book.
www.amazon.com/Black-Man-Gun-Kenneth-Blanchard/dp/156167656X/www30dollarfi-20

Paths to Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions and Concepts by Al-Anon Family Group Head Inc.
A book on codependence.

www.amazon.com/Paths-Recovery-Al-Anons-Traditions-Concepts/dp/0910034311/www30dollarfi-20

Alcoholics Anonymous (a.k.a. "The Big Book") by AA Services
The lightning bolt that started the 12-step recovery fire. Interesting book, but only took me so far.
www.amazon.com/Alcoholics-Story-Thousands-Recovered-Alcoholism/dp/1893007162/www30dollarfi-20

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions by AA Services
Recommended for more detailed understanding of the Twelve Traditions, if you want to apply them to Organization Building.
www.amazon.com/Twelve-Steps-Traditions-AA-Services/dp/0916856291/www30dollarfi-20

Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself by Melody Beattie
Fair book, but I had to ignore the "Recovery Industry" bent.
www.amazon.com/Codependent-No-More-Controlling-Yourself/dp/0894864025/www30dollarfi-20

Robert A. Heinlein – his books are all great, especially on the subject of "no free lunch." Debra Jean and I especially recommend these three:

The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress
www.amazon.com/Moon-Harsh-Mistress-Robert-Heinlein/dp/0312863551/www30dollarfi-20

Farnham's Freehold
www.amazon.com/Farnhams-Freehold-Robert-Heinlein/dp/0671722069/www30dollarfi-20

Glory Road
www.amazon.com/Glory-Road-Robert-Heinlein/dp/0765312220/www30dollarfi-20

What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts? by Michael Bérubé
Michael did a blurb for *A User's Manual for the Human Experience*. His books are a good antidote if you get hungover from too much Heinlein. *What's Liberal?* hasn't influenced me on the subject, but Michael's writing style probably has, and he has certainly influenced me as a friend. (He also read some drafts of the book you're holding and gave me useful feedback.)

www.amazon.com/Whats-Liberal-About-Arts/dp/0393330702/www30dollarfi-20

The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats by Jim Goad.
Good antidote if you are hungover from too much Bérubé.
www.amazon.com/Redneck-Manifesto-Hillbillies-Americas-Scapegoats/dp/0684838648/www30dollarfi-20

Zen Guitar by Phil Sudo
This slim volume was a *huge* influence on me, though some people don't "get it." As with parts of my own books, *Zen Guitar* is more the "why" of art than the "how." When I read this one, I was *home*. I had always been seeking this, I just didn't know it existed. When I read *Zen Guitar*, I felt I'd *arrived*.
www.amazon.com/Zen-Guitar-Philip-Toshio-Sudo/dp/B0013L4CU4/www30dollarfi-20

The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence by Ray Kurzweil
Amazing book, and influenced my thoughts in 1999 on where the nature of technology and business is really headed (small, mobile, no fixed address, ad-hoc, and hiring based on meritocracy rather than college diplomas). This thick tome is truly worth reading. But keep in mind the author may have too much trust in the idea that technology will solve all our problems rather than enslaving us.

Kurzweil is *incredibly* intelligent and forward looking. He invented the flatbed scanner, optical character recognition, text-to-speech synthesis, was a pioneer in electronic music and has done a lot of other nifty things. Lately he's very much in demand with the likes of the US Army as a consultant on nanobots, Artificial Intelligence, technological singularity and other "SkyNet"-type ideas.

Whereas Kurzweil seems to believe that technology will free us because it will be administered by intelligent & benevolent one-world overlords, he reminds me of the kindly scientist in pretty much every sci-fi story ever written. You know the character - the soft-spoken genius family man who doesn't realize how his brilliant gifts are being abused evil men by behind the scenes. This character is usually blind to it because he's just so happy to be taken seriously and because he finally gets to work in a lab with unlimited funding.

Though unlike Dr. Miles Dyson of Cyberdyne Systems in *Terminator Two*, Kurzweil seems highly unlikely to "see the light" and join "our hero" in destroying the technology he helped create, for the *true* good of mankind.

http://www.amazon.com/Age-Spiritual-Machines-Computers-Intelligence/dp/0140282025/www30dollarfi-20

WEBSITES I LIKE:

FREE STATE PROJECT WEBSITES:

Jason Sorens wrote an article in 2001 proposing a Free State Project. Free State Projects are groups of libertarian people committed to moving to one state and encouraging more liberty-minded people to move too. (Jason also did a blurb on the back of this book.)
www.ncc-1776.org/tle2001/libe131-20010723-03.html

Free State Project (New Hampshire)
Forum: http://forum.freestateproject.org/

Ridley Report.
New Hampshire Free Stater Dave Ridley video reports on all the liberty news that fits, and all while wearing a pistol on his hip.
www.ridleyreport.com

Free State Wyoming
www.freestatewyoming.org

Forum also has an FAQ, linked off of this page:
www.fundamentalsoffreedom.com/fswforum/

"The Price of Liberty"
MamaLiberty's very cool liberty information and essay site.
www.thepriceofliberty.org

OTHER COOL SITES:

Kylben's blog (Kyle Bennett)
Smart liberty-lovin' guy writing about a number of things, some of them political, all of them interesting.
www.humanadvancement.net/blog

John Scalzi
Blog by the guy who said that libertarianism basically boils down to "Get off my property!"
http://whatever.scalzi.com/

Pastor Kenneth V. Blanchard, Sr.
More good stuff from my friend who wrote the foreword for this book. Check out his podcast, "The Urban Shooter." (There's a link on his site.)
www.blackmanwithagun.com/

The Orange Papers
Intellectually undoing AA for many years, and doing a good job of it, in my humble opinion.
www.**orange-papers**.org

Stewart Brand's website.
Fiscal conservatism with social compassion, and a lot of smart futurism. Brand also ran one of the first online communities, the Well, which started in 1986.
http://sb.longnow.org

Free MP3 Creative Commons reading of The Constitution of the United States.
"A portable civics lesson" --Wired Magazine's GeekDad
www.debrajeandean.com

Free State hedgie video. Debra Jean and I made this to advertise the New Hampshire Free State Project.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fd8ihmk1YUM

Big Head Press
Free online libertarian gun-toting sex-filled alternative-history sci-fi graphic novels written by L. Neil Smith and Rex May, and illustrated by Scott Bieser. The comic "The Probability Broach" broke my mind, in a great way. I recommend it be read in two-hour or less chunks, or you may find yourself dehydrated, needing to pee, but unable to get up. The one called "Roswell, Texas" is great too.
www.bigheadpress.com/

ORGANIZATIONS

Gun Owners of America
Very no-compromise Second Amendment and self-defense protection organization. I'm a member. How 'bout you?
www.gunowners.org

Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership

Did you know that Hitler disarmed the Jews before killing them, so they couldn't defend themselves? It's true.
The JPFO are *the* most aggressive defender of firearms ownership. And you don't have to be Jewish to join. I'm a member.
www.jpfo.org

National Rifle Association
The largest Second Amendment and self-defense protection organization.
Check out their excellent magazine, "America's First Freedom"
I'm a member.
www.nra.org

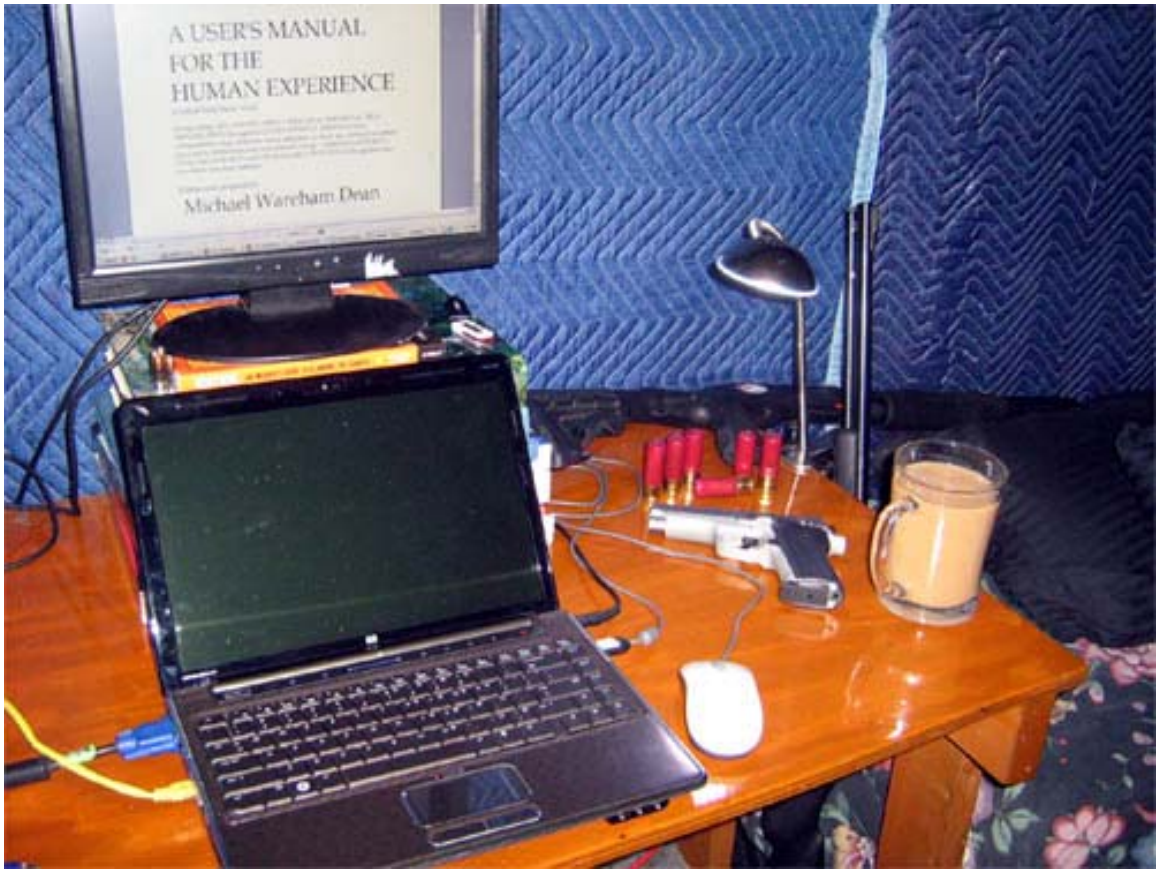

Figure A.1
The Second Amendment Protecting the First Amendment at my house

Appleseed
Me and Debra Jean took a free rifle lesson from them. Learned more in a couple hours than I've ever learned in any single lesson, in any subject. They're sort of like my tech books, they teach the "why" as well as the "how." They tell you a bit

about The Constitution and why citizen riflemanship is important before they teach you how to hit a dinner plate at 500 yards. We're taking a full weekend retreat Appleseed course soon.
(Warning: website contains loud martial drum music. I turn down my speakers for this one.)
www.appleseedinfo.org/

MOVIES AND TV:

A GREAT MOVIE WITH AN EXCELLENT CAUTIONARY EXAMPLE OF WHAT PHYSICAL SELF-DEFENSE IS *NOT*
Felon
Starring Stephen Dorff and Val Kilmer. Shows how your life can be totally screwed if you don't know the difference between self-defense and revenge, and how without training your mind and body ahead of time, you might not know the difference in the heat of the moment.
www.amazon.com/Felon-Anne-Archer/dp/B001AK3S4O/www30dollarfi-20

GREAT MOVIES WITH EXCELLENT CAUTIONARY EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE BEING VERY CODEPENDENT
(Though in true Hollywood fashion, they usually "learn their lesson" by the end, often a little too *conveniently* to seem convincing to me.)

Badder Santa (uncensored, unrated version of *Bad Santa*)
http://www.amazon.com/Badder-Santa-Unrated-Widescreen-Thornton/dp/B00020HAB0/www30dollarfi-20

Swimming with Sharks
www.amazon.com/Swimming-Sharks-Special-Kevin-Spacey/dp/B0009A40EI/www30dollarfi-20

GOOD MOVIE WITH EXCELLENT CAUTIONARY EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE BEING VERY CODEPENDENT

The Royal Tenenbaums
www.amazon.com/Royal-Tenenbaums-Criterion-Collection/dp/B0000640VJ/www30dollarfi-20

OK MOVIE WITH EXCELLENT CAUTIONARY EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE BEING VERY CODEPENDENT

Scrooged
www.amazon.com/Scrooged-Bill-Murray/dp/6305609764/www30dollarfi-20

TV on DVD:

AMAZING TV ON DVD WITH EXCELLENT CAUTIONARY EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE BEING VERY CODEPENDENT
"The Sopranos"
Don't be like *any* of the people in this series. Especially Tony, his sister, his mother, or his wife.
www.amazon.com/The-Sopranos/e/B001CFVQXM/www30dollarfi-20

"The Shield"
Best cop TV ever. A lot of codependence and bad choices too, but maybe they do the best they can with what they've got.
www.amazon.com/The-Shield/e/B001CGBOAG/www30dollarfi-20

"Metalocalypse"
Pickles' brother's wedding (episode "Deth Wedding") is a pretty brutal example of why some people should never speak to their families, ever again.
www.amazon.com/Metalocalypse-Season-2-Tommy-Blacha/dp/B001DZOD7C/www30dollarfi-20

A-MEW! That's all he wrote.

p.s.

I love life. I would never take my own life. Mark my words. If I'm ever found dead of a drug overdose, a suspicious car crash or an apparent suicide, IT WAS MURDER.

Figure A.2
The microphone is mightier than the sword, but it can't hurt to be skilled with both.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
An anagram for "Michael Dean" is "Deal Machine," and that truly fits. Dean never sits on his laurels, and he's constantly touching the world in special places.

Michael Wareham Dean is the author of the books *$30 Film School, $30 Music School, $30 Writing School, Starving in the Company of Beautiful Women, The Simple Pleasures of a Complex Girl, D.I.Y. NOW! Digital Audio* and *YouTube: an Insider's Guide to Climbing the Charts*. He runs the libertarianism 'n' cats pop-culture blog, Stink Fight.

Michael directed the films *Hubert Selby Jr: It/ll Be Better Tomorrow* and *D.I.Y. or DIE: How to Survive as an Independent Artist*.

Michael played guitar in the band The Beef People. He sang and played bass in Baby Opaque and Bomb (Warner Brothers).

Michael W. Dean and his wife Debra Jean Dean are both professional voiceover artists, and also run **The Nestlandia Institute**, a think tank. They live in an undisclosed location in Southern California with their three cats.

They plan to move the whole kitten kaboodle to a farm in rural Wyoming as soon as possible.

The squittens look forward to watching bison out the window.